

Brazil: From Plantation Colony to Agribusiness Republic

Preface: Expanded Core Framework Series

This is a new series using an **Expanded Core Framework** that evolved from the original **Core Framework** .

This expanded analysis was created through continued collaboration between Thomas J. Bryan and Claude (Anthropic's AI system). The collaboration improved both the methodology and the conclusions.

Human Contribution (Thomas J. Bryan):

- Research direction and case study selection
- Theoretical framework and interpretation
- Final analytical judgments and publication decisions

AI Contribution (Claude/Anthropic):

- Historical scholarship synthesis and bibliographic research
- Essay composition and structural analysis
- Intellectual challenge and critical questioning
- Pattern identification and comparative analysis

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Original preface ("An Unexpected Journey") published separately provides full context for how this research project developed.

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Brazil: From Plantation Colony to Agribusiness Republic

Part 1 of 4: Sugar, Slavery, and the Plantation Complex (1500-1822)

Building Extraction Architecture at Continental Scale

Introduction: The Empire That Became a Country

On April 22, 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral's fleet of thirteen ships sighted land after forty-three days sailing west from Lisbon. The Portuguese had been searching for a route to India. Instead, they found what would become Brazil—8.5 million square kilometers of territory that would transform into the largest and most enduring of all Portuguese colonial projects.

When Cabral arrived, between 2 and 5 million indigenous people lived in what is now Brazil. They spoke hundreds of languages, lived in thousands of communities, and had occupied the territory for at least 11,000 years. Within a century of Portuguese arrival, perhaps 90% would be dead—killed by disease, warfare, enslavement, and forced labor. The survivors would be pushed inland, their lands seized, their societies destroyed.

The Portuguese built on this genocide an extraction system that would persist for more than five centuries. Unlike other Portuguese colonial ventures—small islands engineered as plantation laboratories—Brazil presented different challenges and opportunities. The territory was continental. The indigenous population was substantial. The land was extraordinarily diverse, from coastal Atlantic forest to interior cerrado to Amazon rainforest.

But the blueprint remained the same: Seize land, import or enslave labor, plant export crops, extract wealth, maintain hierarchy through violence. The Portuguese spent 322 years (1500-1822) perfecting this system in Brazil. When independence came, the extraction architecture didn't break. It was inherited by a new elite who would maintain it for another 203 years (1822-2025).

This is the story of how that system was built, how it functioned, and why it proved so durable. Part 1 covers the foundation period—three centuries during which Portuguese colonizers established patterns of land concentration, racial hierarchy, forced labor, and wealth extraction that would define Brazil into the twenty-first century.

I. First Contact and Indigenous Genocide (1500-1600)

The Tupi World Before Conquest

When Cabral arrived in 1500, the coastal regions of Brazil were dominated by Tupi-speaking peoples. The Tupi occupied territory stretching from modern São Paulo north to the Amazon mouth—thousands of kilometers of coastline and hundreds of kilometers inland. They lived in villages of 300-2,000 people, practiced shifting agriculture (manioc, maize, beans, squash), hunted, fished, and maintained complex social and political systems.

The Tupi were not a unified political entity. They consisted of numerous groups—Tupinambá, Tupiniquim, Temiminó, Potiguara, Tabajara, and others—who sometimes allied and sometimes fought each other. This political fragmentation would make them vulnerable to Portuguese divide-and-conquer strategies.

Other indigenous groups occupied the interior and different regions: Macro-Jê speakers (Aimoré, Goitacá, Kaingang), Arawak speakers in the Amazon, Karib speakers in the north. Estimates of total indigenous population in 1500 range from 2 million to 5 million, with most scholars settling around 2.5-3 million.

These were sophisticated societies with deep knowledge of the territory, established trade networks, complex cosmologies, and effective governance systems. The Portuguese encountered people who had successfully inhabited and managed one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth for millennia.

The Portuguese Assessment: Land and Labor

The Portuguese Crown initially showed little interest in Brazil. The territory produced no spices, no gold, no obvious wealth. The first decades of contact consisted of trading expeditions that bartered tools and cloth for brazilwood (pau-brasil), a tree whose red dye was valuable in European textile production. Portuguese traders established temporary posts, hired indigenous labor to cut and haul timber, and returned to Lisbon with cargo holds full of logs.

But French traders also began frequenting the coast, threatening Portuguese claims. In 1530, the Portuguese Crown decided to colonize seriously. King João III organized the first settlement expedition led by Martim Afonso de Sousa with 400 men and five ships. The instructions were clear: Establish permanent settlements, distribute land grants, begin agriculture, and secure Portuguese control.

The Portuguese assessed the territory's potential for extraction. The climate was tropical and subtropical—suitable for sugarcane. The soil was fertile, particularly in the coastal zone called the Zona da Mata (Forest Zone) in what became Pernambuco and Bahia. Water was abundant. The land could support plantation agriculture.

But labor was the problem. Sugarcane cultivation and processing required enormous amounts of work. Growing cane, cutting it, hauling it to mills, crushing it, boiling the juice, purifying the sugar—every step was labor-intensive. The Portuguese had perhaps 1,000 settlers in Brazil by 1550. They needed thousands of workers.

The solution was obvious: enslave the indigenous population.

The Enslavement Campaigns (1530-1580)

Portuguese settlers immediately began enslaving indigenous people. The methods varied but the pattern was consistent: Attack villages, capture inhabitants, force them to work on Portuguese estates or sell them to other colonists.

Some enslavement was justified through the concept of "just war." Portuguese authorities claimed that indigenous groups who attacked Portuguese settlements or refused to accept Christianity could be legitimately enslaved as prisoners of war. This provided legal cover for military expeditions specifically designed to capture people.

Other enslavement occurred through debt bondage or "ransoming." Portuguese traders would offer goods to indigenous leaders, creating debts that could be paid through labor. Or they would "ransom" captives held by one indigenous group and then claim these ransomed people as their own slaves.

The Catholic Church officially opposed indigenous enslavement (while supporting African enslavement), arguing that indigenous people were potential Christians who should be converted, not enslaved. Jesuit missionaries established aldeias (mission villages) where indigenous people would be "protected" from enslavement while being converted to Christianity and taught to labor for the missions.

But in practice, enslavement was widespread. By 1570, approximately 50,000-80,000 indigenous people had been enslaved in the Portuguese settlements. They worked on sugar plantations, in households, on cattle ranches, and in all forms of colonial labor.

The Demographic Catastrophe

Enslavement was deadly, but disease was far worse. The indigenous population had no immunity to Old World diseases. Smallpox, measles, typhus, and influenza swept through communities with devastating effect. The first major smallpox epidemic hit in 1562-1563, killing tens of thousands. Subsequent epidemics occurred regularly.

The mortality was staggering. Modern estimates suggest that 85-95% of the indigenous population along the coast died between 1500 and 1600. A population of perhaps 1-2 million in coastal regions in 1500 had been reduced to perhaps 100,000-200,000 by 1600.

Some communities were completely exterminated. Others fled inland, abandoning their territories. Still others were reduced to remnant populations living in mission villages or on the margins of Portuguese settlements.

This was genocide—the systematic destruction of peoples. Whether death came from disease (often deliberately spread), warfare, enslavement, or forced labor, the result was the same: Indigenous societies along the coast were destroyed, their lands seized, their populations decimated.

Portuguese Responses: More Slaves From Africa

The collapse of the indigenous population created a labor crisis for Portuguese plantation owners. Sugarcane cultivation was expanding rapidly. By 1570, Brazil had approximately 60 sugar mills (engenhos) producing sugar for export to Europe. Each engenho required 60-100 workers. Where would the labor come from?

The answer arrived from Africa. Portuguese traders had been purchasing enslaved Africans since the 1440s, initially to work on Atlantic island plantations (Madeira, São Tomé, Cape Verde) and in Portugal itself. Beginning in the 1560s-1570s, African slaves began arriving in Brazil in significant numbers.

By 1600, approximately 30,000-50,000 enslaved Africans had been brought to Brazil. Most came from West Africa—particularly from regions the Portuguese called "Guinea" (modern Senegambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone) and "Angola" (Kingdom of Kongo and Angola region). The transatlantic slave trade to Brazil had begun. It would continue for nearly 300 years, bringing approximately 4-5 million enslaved Africans to Brazil—more than any other destination in the Americas.

The Racial Hierarchy Established

By 1600, Brazilian colonial society had developed a racial hierarchy that would persist for centuries:

Top tier: Portuguese settlers

- Controlled land through sesmaria grants (see next section)
- Owned slaves and engenhos
- Held official positions in colonial government
- Monopolized literacy and education
- Perhaps 30,000-50,000 people

Middle tier: Mixed-race free population

- Children of Portuguese men and indigenous or African women
- Worked as overseers, artisans, small traders

- Had some property rights but limited political rights
- Occupied intermediary positions in colonial economy
- Perhaps 15,000-30,000 people

Bottom tier: Enslaved indigenous and African people

- Owned as property
- Forced to work on plantations, in households, in all forms of labor
- No legal rights
- Subject to violence, sale, and exploitation
- Perhaps 50,000-80,000 people (including both indigenous and African)

Excluded: Unconquered indigenous peoples

- Pushed inland from coast
- Maintained autonomy in territories Portuguese hadn't reached
- Targeted for future enslavement campaigns
- Perhaps 1-1.5 million remaining (from 2-3 million in 1500)

This hierarchy was enforced through law, custom, and violence. Portuguese descent meant privilege and power. African or indigenous descent meant enslavement or subordination. Mixed descent meant an ambiguous middle position that could be leveraged for social mobility but always remained below pure Portuguese status.

The system was designed to prevent unified resistance. Mixed-race overseers benefited from the system relative to enslaved workers. Free Africans and indigenous people could improve their position by cooperating with Portuguese authorities. Enslaved people from different ethnic groups and language backgrounds had difficulty coordinating resistance.

II. The Sugar Plantation Complex (1580-1700)

The Engenho System

The sugar engenho was not just a mill—it was a comprehensive extraction unit that combined agriculture, processing, and social control into a single estate. Understanding how engenhos functioned is essential to understanding how Brazil's extraction system worked.

Physical layout:

The typical engenho by 1650 consisted of:

Casa-grande (big house): Two-story residence where the senhor de engenho (plantation owner) and his family lived. Built of stone or brick, with tile roof, surrounded by gardens and walls. This was the symbol of power—elevated, fortified, dominating the landscape.

Senzala (slave quarters): Long barracks or rows of small huts where enslaved workers lived. Minimal shelter, no privacy, designed for control not comfort. Located within sight of the casa-grande so the senhor could monitor the enslaved population.

Capela (chapel): Every engenho had a chapel where Mass was held. The Catholic Church was integrated into the plantation system. Priests blessed the sugar harvest, baptized enslaved children, and provided religious justification for the hierarchy.

Moenda (mill): The grinding mill where sugarcane was crushed to extract juice. Early mills were powered by oxen or water wheels. This was dangerous work—workers could lose fingers, hands, or arms in the crushing rollers.

Casa de purgar (purging house): Where sugar was refined. The cane juice was boiled in a series of copper kettles to remove impurities and crystallize the sugar. This required skilled labor and constant attention. The heat was extreme.

Storage buildings: For sugar awaiting shipment, for tools, for food supplies.

Fields: Surrounding land planted with sugarcane, typically 50-200 hectares in cultivation (with much more land claimed but not cultivated).

Defensive features: Many engenhos had watchtowers, walls, and armed guards to prevent slave escapes and defend against indigenous attacks or raids by rival colonists.

The engenho was a self-contained world where the senhor exercised nearly absolute power over everyone who lived there.

Labor organization:

By 1650, a typical large engenho employed 80-150 enslaved workers, organized into specialized roles:

Field gangs (60-70% of slaves): Planted, weeded, and harvested sugarcane. This was the hardest work—bending under the tropical sun, wielding machetes for hours, hauling bundles of cut cane. Field slaves had the shortest life expectancy.

Mill workers (15-20%): Operated the grinding machinery, fed cane into the rollers, collected the juice. Required skill but was extremely dangerous. Injuries and deaths were common.

Boiler house workers (10-15%): Tended the fires, managed the boiling kettles, monitored the crystallization process. Required the most skill. These were typically the most valued slaves.

Domestic workers (5-10%): Worked in the casa-grande as cooks, cleaners, nannies, and personal servants. Proximity to the senhor's family was both privilege (better food, lighter work) and danger (sexual exploitation, arbitrary violence).

Overseers and drivers: Usually mulatto (mixed-race) workers who supervised field gangs. They enforced discipline, carried whips, and acted as intermediaries between senhor and slaves.

The work schedule was brutal. During harvest season (July-November), slaves worked 16-18 hours per day, seven days per week. The mill ran continuously day and night because cut cane had to be processed within 24 hours or the juice would ferment and be lost. Outside harvest season, work continued but hours decreased slightly to 10-12 per day.

Economic model:

The senhor de engenho's wealth came from selling sugar to European markets. The economics worked like this:

Production costs:

- Purchase of enslaved workers: 50-100 mil-réis per person (1650s prices)
- Food for workers: Minimal—usually manioc flour, beans, dried fish
- Equipment and maintenance: Copper kettles, iron tools, building repairs
- Transportation to port: Ox carts hauling sugar to Recife or Salvador

Revenue:

- Sugar prices in Lisbon/Amsterdam: 1,000-2,000 réis per arroba (15 kg)
- Large engenho production: 3,000-5,000 arrobas per year
- Gross revenue: 3,000-10,000 mil-réis per year

Profit margin:

- Approximately 30-50% in good years
- Enough to recover slave purchase costs within 3-5 years
- Enough to make senhores de engenho the wealthiest people in colonial Brazil

But these calculations depended on stolen labor. The enslaved workers received nothing. Their work created the wealth. The senhor captured it all.

Land Concentration Through Sesmarias

The Portuguese Crown distributed land in Brazil through the sesmaria system—grants of enormous territories to Portuguese settlers who promised to cultivate them. This system created extreme land concentration from the beginning.

How sesmarias worked:

Size: Grants ranged from 10 square leagues (about 27,000 hectares) to 50 square leagues (135,000 hectares) or more. There were theoretical limits, but in practice senhores claimed vast territories.

Conditions: The recipient had to be Portuguese, Catholic, and committed to developing the land within 5 years. Development meant establishing agriculture—usually sugarcane plantations.

Cost: Free. The Crown granted land at no charge, expecting the development of the territory to benefit Portugal through export taxes.

Indigenous displacement: The land was described in grants as "vacant" or "belonging to the Crown." In reality, it was occupied by indigenous peoples. The grants explicitly authorized the grantee to expel or enslave any indigenous inhabitants.

By 1650, approximately 600-800 sesmarias had been granted in Pernambuco and Bahia (the two major sugar-producing regions). Each represented tens of thousands of hectares. The result was that perhaps 1,000-1,500 Portuguese families controlled virtually all of the coastal agricultural land from São Paulo to Maranhão.

Inheritance patterns:

Portuguese inheritance law (based on Roman law with Catholic modifications) divided estates among all legitimate children, with the eldest son receiving a larger share (the morgado or entailed estate). This should have fragmented land holdings over generations.

But several mechanisms prevented fragmentation:

Strategic marriages: Wealthy families married their children to each other, keeping estates consolidated. The son of one senhor would marry the daughter of another, combining their land holdings.

Purchase of siblings' shares: The eldest son would buy out his siblings' inheritance shares, reconsolidating the estate.

Expansion into new territories: Rather than dividing existing estates, families would claim new sesmarias in frontier zones, expanding their total holdings.

Illegitimate children: Portuguese senhores fathered many children with enslaved women. These mulatto children had no inheritance rights, preventing estate division.

The result was remarkable continuity. Families that controlled vast estates in 1600 still controlled vast estates (sometimes the exact same land) in 1700, 1800, and even 2000.

The Bahia and Pernambuco Sugar Kingdoms

By 1650, two regions dominated Brazilian sugar production and wealth:

Bahia (centered on Salvador):

- Capital of colonial Brazil (1549-1763)
- Approximately 80-100 engenhos
- Annual production: ~8,000-10,000 tons of sugar
- Enslaved population: ~50,000-70,000
- Controlled by perhaps 200-300 senhor families

Pernambuco (centered on Recife/Olinda):

- The richest region in Brazil
- Approximately 120-150 engenhos
- Annual production: ~12,000-15,000 tons of sugar
- Enslaved population: ~60,000-80,000
- Controlled by perhaps 250-350 senhor families

These were not provinces in the modern sense—they were plantation complexes that generated enormous wealth. The senhores de engenho lived like feudal lords. They had private armies of armed retainers. They administered justice on their estates. They controlled local government. The Portuguese Crown collected taxes and appointed governors, but day-to-day power was exercised by the plantation elite.

Social structure of the sugar regions:

Top 1%: Senhores de engenho and their families—controlled land, slaves, and mills. Perhaps 1,000-1,500 families across both regions.

Next 5%: Lavradores de cana (cane farmers) who owned land and slaves but not mills, selling their cane to engenhos for processing. Merchants who handled sugar exports. Government officials. Military officers. Perhaps 5,000-7,000 people.

Next 15%: Small farmers, artisans, overseers, free mulatto workers, poor Portuguese immigrants. Perhaps 15,000-20,000 people.

Bottom 60-70%: Enslaved Africans and indigenous people. Perhaps 110,000-150,000 people.

Outside the system: Unconquered indigenous peoples in the interior. Escaped slaves living in quilombos (maroon communities). Perhaps 50,000-100,000 people.

The wealth concentration was extreme. The top 1% owned virtually all productive land and 80-90% of all slaves. They controlled the political system. They lived in luxury while hundreds of thousands worked in bondage.

Violence and Control

The plantation system required constant violence to maintain. Enslaved people outnumbered free people by large margins. On individual engenhos, 100 slaves might be controlled by a senhor, his family, and 3-5 armed overseers. The numerical imbalance meant that control depended on terror.

Forms of violence:

Whipping: The standard punishment. Overseers carried leather whips (chicotes) and used them frequently for any perceived infraction—working too slowly, damaging equipment, "insolence," attempting to escape. Slaves could receive 25, 50, or 100 lashes. The whipping was often public to terrorize other slaves.

Branding: Slaves were branded with hot irons marking their owner's initials. This was both property marking and humiliation.

Amputation: Fingers, hands, or feet could be amputated as punishment for theft or repeated escape attempts.

Execution: Senhores could order slaves killed for serious infractions like violence against overseers or participation in rebellion. Executions were public and designed to terrorize.

Sexual violence: Women and girls were routinely raped by senhores, their sons, and overseers. Pregnancy offered no protection. Children born from rape were born into slavery.

Family separation: Slaves could be sold away from families at any time. This threat was used to enforce compliance—parents would submit to avoid being separated from children.

The legal framework:

Portuguese colonial law granted senhores nearly unlimited power over their slaves. The principle of dominium (absolute ownership) meant the senhor's property rights included the right to use violence to control his property.

There were theoretical limits. The Catholic Church insisted that slaves had souls and should be allowed to attend Mass, be baptized, and marry (with owner permission). The Crown occasionally issued regulations limiting the most extreme violence.

But in practice, these limits meant nothing. Senhores controlled local justice. They were the judges. A slave who killed a senhor in self-defense would be executed. A senhor who killed a slave faced no punishment—he had merely destroyed his own property.

Resistance: Quilombos and Revolts

Enslaved people resisted constantly. Resistance took many forms:

Daily resistance: Working slowly, breaking tools, feigning illness, small acts of sabotage. This was constant but rarely documented because it was seen as normal discipline problems.

Flight: Slaves escaped whenever possible. Some tried to return to Africa (impossible, but the hope persisted). Most fled to the interior, hoping to join indigenous communities or establish quilombos.

Quilombos (maroon communities): Escaped slaves established independent settlements in areas beyond Portuguese control. The most famous was Palmares.

Quilombo dos Palmares (1605-1694):

The largest and longest-lasting quilombo in Brazilian history was Palmares, located in the interior of Alagoas (between Pernambuco and Bahia). At its height around 1650-1670, Palmares had a population of 20,000-30,000 people—larger than any Portuguese settlement in Brazil except Salvador and Recife.

Palmares was not a single settlement but a confederation of villages (mocambos) spread across the interior. The inhabitants grew manioc, maize, and beans; hunted; and raided Portuguese estates for weapons, tools, and to liberate more enslaved people.

Palmares had a king (the most famous was Zumbi, who ruled 1680-1695), a governing council, and a military structure. It successfully defended itself against Portuguese expeditions for nearly 90 years.

The Portuguese finally destroyed Palmares in 1694 after a sustained campaign involving thousands of soldiers and indigenous allies. Zumbi was captured and killed in 1695, his head displayed in Recife as a warning to other slaves.

But Palmares had demonstrated that enslaved people could organize, fight, and maintain autonomous communities despite overwhelming Portuguese military superiority. The very existence of Palmares for 90 years proved the fragility of the plantation system—it required constant violence because the enslaved majority never accepted their enslavement.

Revolts:

Slave revolts occurred regularly, though most were quickly suppressed:

1640s Pernambuco: During the Dutch occupation (1630-1654), enslaved Africans rebelled multiple times, hoping to take advantage of the conflict between Portuguese and Dutch.

1650s-1670s Bahia: Several engenho revolts where enslaved workers killed overseers or senhores and attempted to flee to the interior.

Most revolts were crushed within days or weeks. The Portuguese response was always the same: Execute the leaders, publicly torture and kill participants as examples, tighten control on remaining slaves.

But the constant rebellions and the persistent existence of quilombos demonstrated that the extraction system rested on violence because it lacked consent. The enslaved majority worked only because they were forced to work. The moment violence slackened, resistance resumed.

III. Expansion and the Gold Rush (1700-1822)

The Bandeirantes and Interior Conquest

While sugar dominated the coast, the Portuguese pushed into the interior searching for wealth and slaves. These expeditions were called bandeiras, and their participants were bandeirantes—men who would become legendary in Brazilian history as brave explorers, though in reality they were primarily slave hunters and indigenous exterminators.

Origins:

The bandeirantes operated mainly from São Paulo, which in the 1600s-1700s was a poor, isolated settlement far from the wealthy sugar regions. São Paulo's population was primarily mameluco (Portuguese-indigenous mixed), and the settlement survived by capturing and selling indigenous slaves to coastal plantations.

Methods:

Bandeira expeditions consisted of dozens or hundreds of men—mamelucos, Portuguese settlers, and often allied indigenous warriors. They would march into the interior for months or years, attacking indigenous villages, capturing inhabitants, and marching them back to São Paulo for sale.

The bandeirantes also targeted Jesuit missions. The Jesuits had established mission villages (reduções) where they congregated indigenous peoples for conversion and "civilized" labor. These missions contained thousands of people who had already been "pacified"—making them easy targets. Bandeirantes raided missions repeatedly, capturing entire populations.

The most notorious bandeirante slaver was Antônio Raposo Tavares, who led multiple expeditions in the 1620s-1650s, attacking missions in what is now Paraguay, capturing thousands of Guaraní people, and selling them in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Geographic impact:

The bandeirantes pushed the boundaries of Portuguese control deep into the interior. They traveled thousands of kilometers up rivers, across plateaus, through Amazon forests. Most of modern Brazil's interior was first penetrated by these slave-hunting expeditions.

The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) had theoretically divided South America between Spain and Portugal, with most of what is now Brazil falling in the Spanish zone. But the bandeirantes ignored this, pushing Portuguese claims far beyond the treaty line. By 1700, Portuguese control extended from the Amazon to Rio de la Plata—a continental empire built partly through bandeirante expeditions.

The cost was the continued destruction of indigenous peoples. Communities that had survived coastal contact were now hunted in the interior. By 1700, the indigenous population in areas reached by bandeirantes had collapsed just as thoroughly as the coastal population had by 1600.

The Gold Discovery and Mining Boom

In the 1690s, bandeirantes discovered gold in the interior region that would become Minas Gerais (General Mines). Small deposits were found first, then in 1693-1695, major strikes occurred in the streams and rivers of the highlands northwest of Rio de Janeiro.

The impact was immediate and transformative. News of gold triggered a massive migration. People abandoned coastal plantations and cities, rushing to the mining zones. By 1710, perhaps 30,000-50,000 people had moved to Minas Gerais. By 1750, the population reached 200,000-300,000—making it the most populous region in Brazil.

Mining organization:

Unlike sugar plantations which required large capital investments, gold mining could be done on various scales:

Small-scale miners: Individual miners or small groups working placer deposits (panning streams, digging river gravels). In the early years, many miners worked alone or with a few enslaved helpers.

Large-scale operations: Wealthy investors brought dozens or hundreds of enslaved workers to excavate hillsides, divert streams, and process large quantities of gravel and ore.

Labor:

The mining boom created enormous demand for enslaved labor. Tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were brought to Minas Gerais between 1700-1760. By 1750, the enslaved population in the mining region was 150,000-200,000—two-thirds of the total population.

Mining was even deadlier than plantation labor. Miners worked in water for hours, digging and panning. Respiratory diseases, drowning, cave-ins, and exhaustion killed thousands. Life expectancy for enslaved miners was perhaps 7-10 years after arrival.

Royal taxation:

The Portuguese Crown claimed one-fifth of all gold mined (the quinto). Enforcing this tax required elaborate bureaucracy. Gold had to be brought to official foundries where it was smelted, taxed, and stamped. Smuggling was endemic and harshly punished.

Between 1700-1770, Brazil produced approximately 800-1,000 tons of gold—roughly half of all gold mined globally during that period. Most flowed to Lisbon, enriching the Portuguese Crown and financing Portugal's trade with the rest of Europe.

Social structure in the mining zones:

Minas Gerais developed a different social structure than the plantation regions:

Mining elite (5%): Owned large mining operations and many slaves. Some accumulated enormous fortunes—matching or exceeding sugar senhores' wealth.

Small miners and merchants (15-20%): Operated small claims, ran supply shops, provided services to miners.

Free mulatto and Black population (15-20%): In the mining zones, some enslaved people earned enough through informal work to purchase their freedom. Minas Gerais had the largest free Black population in Brazil by 1750—perhaps 30,000-40,000 people.

Enslaved majority (60%): Worked the mines, the support services, and agriculture to feed the mining population.

Urban development:

Mining generated towns and cities in the interior. Vila Rica (modern Ouro Preto), Sabará, Mariana, and other mining towns grew rapidly. By 1750, Vila Rica had 20,000-30,000 inhabitants—making it one of the largest cities in the Portuguese empire.

These mining towns developed baroque architecture, churches decorated with gold leaf, cultural life with musicians and artists, and elaborate social hierarchies. The wealth extracted from enslaved miners' labor built cities.

Economic Transformation

The gold boom transformed Brazil's economy and its relationship with Portugal:

Shift of economic center: Rio de Janeiro became the main export port for gold, surpassing Salvador. In 1763, the colonial capital was moved from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro, reflecting the economic shift from sugar to gold.

Development of the South: The mining boom stimulated cattle ranching in what is now Rio Grande do Sul and southern Minas Gerais. Mules were needed to transport goods to the mining zones. Cattle provided meat and leather. The southern interior developed as a ranching frontier.

Continued sugar production: Despite the gold boom's excitement, sugar remained important. The Northeast continued producing sugar for export. The plantation system persisted alongside the mining economy.

Portugal's dependence: Portugal became economically dependent on Brazilian gold. The Crown used gold revenue to finance government operations, pay for imports from Britain and other European powers, and maintain Portugal's navy. When gold production declined after 1770, Portugal faced fiscal crisis.

Brazil's growing importance: By 1750, Brazil was by far Portugal's most valuable colonial possession. The sugar and gold wealth dwarfed anything Portugal extracted from its African or Asian colonies. This made Brazil increasingly difficult for Portugal to control.

The Decline of Gold and Rise of Cotton/Coffee

Gold production peaked around 1750-1760 and then declined steadily. The easiest deposits had been exhausted. Deeper mining required more capital and technology than most miners possessed. By 1800, gold mining was much reduced.

But other export commodities emerged:

Cotton (1760s-1810s): The Industrial Revolution in Britain created massive demand for cotton. Brazilian planters, particularly in Maranhão and Pernambuco, began growing cotton for export. The crop required less capital than sugar but still used slave labor extensively.

Coffee (1800s onward): Coffee was introduced to Brazil in the early 1700s but remained minor until the 1800s. By 1820, coffee plantations were expanding rapidly in Rio de Janeiro province, using the same plantation-slave labor model as sugar.

The pattern repeated: New crops emerged, but the fundamental system—land concentration, slave labor, export-oriented monoculture, wealth extraction by a small elite—remained unchanged.

Indigenous Peoples by 1800: Decimation and Displacement

By 1800, the indigenous population in Portuguese-controlled territories had been reduced to perhaps 200,000-400,000—from 2.5-3 million in 1500. Most survivors lived in the Amazon and western interior regions that remained beyond effective Portuguese control.

In coastal and southern regions: Indigenous peoples had been killed, enslaved, absorbed into the colonial population as laborers, or pushed inland. Entire ethnic groups had disappeared. Languages had gone extinct. Territories had been seized completely.

In the Amazon: Some indigenous groups maintained autonomy, but Portuguese expansion continued. The Amazon was increasingly penetrated by Portuguese expeditions seeking indigenous slaves, turtle eggs, cacao, and other forest products.

Legal status: By 1800, indigenous enslavement was officially illegal (banned by various royal decrees in the 1750s-1770s under Marquês de Pombal's reforms). But in practice, indigenous people were still forced into labor through debt bondage, "voluntary" service that was actually coerced, and outright illegal enslavement that went unpunished.

The fundamental reality: Portuguese colonization had destroyed indigenous societies across most of Brazil, seizing their lands and replacing them with a plantation-slave extraction system.

IV. The Slave Trade and African Brazil (1550-1822)

Scale and Organization

Brazil received more enslaved Africans than any other destination in the Americas. Current estimates suggest approximately 4.0-4.9 million enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil between 1550 and 1850 (when the trade to Brazil finally ended). This represents about 35-40% of the entire transatlantic slave trade.

Periodization of the trade:

Early period (1550-1700): 500,000-700,000 enslaved people brought to Brazil, primarily to work sugar plantations in Bahia and Pernambuco.

Mining period (1700-1770): 1.2-1.5 million enslaved people brought to Brazil, with large numbers directed to the gold and diamond mining regions.

Late plantation period (1770-1822): 1.0-1.3 million enslaved people brought to Brazil, working on sugar, cotton, coffee, and cattle ranches.

Final period (1822-1850): 1.3-1.5 million enslaved people brought to Brazil, despite international pressure to end the trade. This continued illegal importation after 1822 will be covered in Part 2.

African origins:

Enslaved people brought to Brazil came from multiple regions of Africa, with origins shifting over time:

West-Central Africa (Angola/Congo region): 45-50% of total, throughout the entire period. This was the Portuguese stronghold in Africa, making transport relatively direct.

West Africa (Bight of Benin/Nigeria region): 20-25% of total, particularly in the 1700s-1800s. Yoruba, Fon, Hausa, and other peoples.

West Africa (Bight of Biafra/Cameroon region): 10-15% of total, particularly in the late 1700s-1800s. Igbo, Ibibio, and other peoples.

Upper Guinea (Senegambia/Guinea-Bissau/Sierra Leone): 5-10% of total, primarily in early period.

Southeast Africa (Mozambique region): 5-10% of total, primarily in late period when other sources became more difficult.

This diversity of origins meant that enslaved people in Brazil spoke dozens of different languages, practiced different religions, and came from societies with very different social structures. This diversity made unified resistance more difficult—though not impossible, as the quilombos demonstrated.

The Middle Passage and Arrival

The voyage from Africa to Brazil typically took 40-60 days, depending on departure point. Conditions aboard slave ships were horrific:

Mortality: Approximately 10-20% of enslaved people died during the voyage from disease, malnutrition, or despair. On particularly deadly voyages, mortality could reach 30-40%.

Physical conditions: People were packed into ships' holds with minimal space, often chained to prevent rebellion. Sanitation was non-existent. Disease spread rapidly. The stench was overwhelming.

Psychological trauma: Survivors arrived in Brazil traumatized—torn from families and communities, subjected to violence and degradation, facing an unknown future in a strange land.

Processing upon arrival:

Ships arrived at ports (primarily Salvador, Recife, and later Rio de Janeiro). Enslaved people were:

- 1. Quarantined:** Ships with obvious disease outbreaks were quarantined offshore.

2. Cleaned and prepared: Surviving captives were washed, sometimes given new clothes, and prepared for sale.

3. Sold at market: Auctions or private sales transferred people to purchasers. Families were routinely separated. Children were sold away from mothers. Spouses were divided.

4. Transported to final destinations: Purchasers marched or shipped their new slaves to plantations, mines, or cities—often hundreds of kilometers from ports.

The entire process—from capture in Africa through sale in Brazil—was designed to destroy social ties, eliminate resistance capacity, and reduce human beings to commodities.

African Culture and Resistance

Despite the violence and displacement, enslaved Africans maintained cultural practices and built new communities:

Religion: African religious traditions persisted and evolved. Yoruba orisha worship became candomblé in Bahia. Kongo/Angola religious practices influenced umbanda. These religions were officially prohibited but practiced secretly. Syncretism with Catholic saints allowed some public practice.

Language: While Portuguese became the lingua franca, African languages persisted in communities with high concentrations from specific regions. Kimbundu and Kikongo vocabulary entered Brazilian Portuguese, particularly in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.

Music and dance: African musical traditions—drumming, call-and-response singing, dance—survived and became foundational to Brazilian music. Samba has roots in Angolan semba. Capoeira (martial art disguised as dance) developed as a form of resistance training.

Family and community: Enslaved people created families despite the constant threat of separation. Communities formed in senzalas, with kinship networks, mutual support, and collective memory of African origins.

Resistance: Beyond quilombos and revolts (discussed earlier), resistance included maintaining African identity, teaching children about origins, preserving religious practices, and preparing for eventual freedom—even if freedom seemed impossible.

The Free Black Population

By 1800, Brazil had a substantial free Black and mulatto population—perhaps 400,000-600,000 people, roughly one-third of the total Black population.

Paths to freedom:

Manumission (alforria): Owners could free slaves through legal document. Reasons varied: Payment by the enslaved person (who had somehow earned money), owner's will upon death, sexual relationship between owner and enslaved woman (freeing her and children), or occasionally as reward for service.

Self-purchase: Enslaved people who earned money through informal work could sometimes purchase their freedom. This was more common in urban areas where slaves could work as street vendors, artisans, or day laborers and keep some earnings.

Children of free mothers: By law, children took the legal status of their mothers. If the mother was free, children were free—regardless of the father's status.

Military service: Occasionally, enslaved people were freed in exchange for military service.

The situation of free Black people:

Freedom didn't mean equality:

Legal restrictions: Free Black people faced numerous restrictions—couldn't hold government office, restricted from certain professions, subject to special taxes, required to carry documentation proving free status.

Economic vulnerability: Most free Black people were poor—working as day laborers, small farmers, artisans, domestic servants, or in informal economy. Land ownership was rare. Capital was scarce.

Social discrimination: Racial hierarchy persisted. Free Black people were considered inferior to whites. Mulatto people (mixed) ranked above Black people in social hierarchy, creating divisions within the free Black population.

Military segregation: Free Black men served in separate military units (ordenanças and milícias), never mixing with white units and never commanding white soldiers.

Precarity: Freedom could be precarious. Free Black people could be kidnapped and sold into slavery if they lacked documentation. The presumption was often enslavement until freedom was proven.

Despite these restrictions, the free Black population represented an important reality: Slavery was not permanent for everyone. Freedom was possible. This created hope among the enslaved and provided living examples that the racial hierarchy was not immutable.

V. The Colonial State and Elite Coordination

Portuguese Administration

Portugal governed Brazil through a hierarchical administrative system designed to extract wealth while maintaining order:

Viceroyalty (after 1720): The Viceroy represented the Portuguese Crown and had supreme authority. Based first in Salvador (1549-1763), then Rio de Janeiro (1763-1822).

Captaincies (Capitanias): Brazil was divided into captaincies, each governed by a captain-general appointed by the Crown. Major captaincies included Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and others.

Municipal councils (Câmaras): Towns had elected councils (elected by property owners only) that handled local administration—markets, roads, local taxes, public order.

Judiciary: Royal judges (ouvidores) administered justice based on Portuguese law. But in practice, local elites dominated the courts.

Military: Small regular army units supplemented by militia and ordenanças (territorial forces). The military's primary role was suppressing slave revolts and indigenous resistance, not defending against foreign invasion.

Church: The Catholic Church was integrated into colonial administration through the padroado (royal patronage) system—the Crown appointed bishops and controlled Church revenues.

How Colonial Governance Served Elite Interests

The Portuguese colonial state existed primarily to facilitate extraction by the plantation elite:

Land grants: The Crown granted sesmarias to politically connected families, concentrating land in elite hands.

Slave trade support: Royal ships transported enslaved people. Royal officials taxed but enabled the trade. The Crown depended on slave-generated revenues.

Legal protection: Portuguese law protected senhores' property rights over slaves and land. Courts enforced debt contracts, returned escaped slaves, and punished resistance.

Tax collection: Royal officials collected taxes but didn't challenge elite wealth or redistribute it. Taxes on sugar, gold, and slave imports financed Portugal but didn't reduce elite accumulation.

Violence monopoly: The colonial state maintained military force primarily to suppress slave revolts, indigenous resistance, and quilombos—protecting elite interests against popular resistance.

Education restriction: The Crown and Church maintained a near-monopoly on education, limiting literacy and knowledge to elite children.

Elite Network Coordination

The plantation elite maintained their power through coordinated networks:

Intermarriage: Wealthy families married their children to each other, consolidating land and slaves across generations. The same surnames—Souza, Albuquerque, Melo, Pinto, Cavalcanti—appeared repeatedly among the elite.

Business partnerships: Senhores de engenho formed partnerships to finance sugar shipments, purchase slaves, and invest in new ventures.

Political domination: Elite families monopolized positions on municipal councils, militia commands, and other local offices. They used these positions to protect their interests.

Church integration: Elite sons often became priests, bishops, or Jesuit officials. This gave families influence over religious institutions and access to Church wealth.

Shared ideology: The elite developed and maintained shared beliefs justifying their position: Racial superiority of Europeans, Catholic divine sanction for hierarchy, economic arguments about slavery's necessity, and paternalist narratives about civilizing mission.

Violence coordination: When threatened by slave revolts or quilombos, senhores coordinated military responses—pooling resources to hire mercenaries, organizing joint expeditions, and sharing intelligence.

This elite coordination ensured that despite occasional conflicts between families or regions, the fundamental system persisted. Different families might compete for specific advantages, but they agreed on maintaining land concentration, slavery, racial hierarchy, and wealth extraction.

VI. Education, Literacy, and Information Control

The Education System: Designed for Exclusion

Portuguese colonial authorities and the Catholic Church maintained tight control over education in Brazil, deliberately restricting access to maintain hierarchy.

What education existed:

Jesuit schools (1549-1759): The Jesuits established schools in major towns to educate elite children. Curriculum focused on Latin, Catholic theology, rhetoric, and classical studies. These schools educated perhaps 1,000-2,000 students per year across all of Brazil in the 1700s.

Seminary education: Training for the priesthood was available to elite sons. Required literacy in Portuguese and Latin, knowledge of theology and canon law.

Private tutors: Wealthy families hired tutors (often priests or educated Portuguese immigrants) to teach their children at home.

No public education: There were no schools for common people, no literacy programs, no mass education. Education was a privilege, not a right.

Expulsion of Jesuits (1759): The Marquês de Pombal expelled the Jesuit order from the Portuguese Empire in 1759, eliminating the most extensive education system in Brazil. Jesuit schools closed. Educational access declined further.

Literacy rates by 1822:

Precise statistics don't exist, but estimates suggest:

White elite males: 30-40% literate

White elite females: 5-10% literate

Free mulatto males: 5-10% literate

Free mulatto females: <2% literate

Enslaved population: <0.5% literate

Overall population: 5-10% literate maximum

This meant that 90-95% of Brazil's population in 1822 could not read or write. This was deliberate. Literacy would have enabled resistance, allowed enslaved people to forge freedom documents, permitted communication beyond elite control.

Information Control Mechanisms

The Portuguese colonial state and Church controlled information flow:

Censorship: All printed materials entering Brazil required royal approval. Books challenging Catholic doctrine, Portuguese authority, or social hierarchy were prohibited.

No printing press (until 1808): Portugal prohibited printing presses in Brazil until 1808 (when the royal court fled to Rio de Janeiro during Napoleonic wars). This meant no newspapers, no books published locally, no pamphlets—complete print information control.

Mail surveillance: Royal officials monitored correspondence, particularly anything that might indicate sedition or heresy.

Inquisition: The Portuguese Inquisition maintained representatives in Brazil, investigating heresy, Judaism, witchcraft, and other threats to Catholic orthodoxy. This created climate of ideological surveillance.

Language control: Official documents, laws, and education were in Portuguese. Indigenous languages and African languages were suppressed in favor of Portuguese, consolidating elite linguistic monopoly.

The Purpose: Maintaining Extractive Hierarchy

This information control served clear purposes:

Preventing organized resistance: Illiterate enslaved people couldn't communicate across long distances, couldn't access legal knowledge, couldn't read abolitionist writings from Europe, couldn't forge freedom documents.

Maintaining religious monopoly: Restricting access to scripture and theological writings to priests maintained Catholic Church control over religious interpretation.

Limiting political consciousness: Without education and information access, most people remained unaware of alternative systems, enlightenment philosophy, or rights concepts developing in Europe and North America.

Preserving elite culture: Education in Latin and classical studies marked elite status and separated educated senhores from the ignorant masses.

The extraction system depended not just on violence but on ignorance. Keeping the majority illiterate and uninformed made resistance more difficult and justified elite rule as a paternalist necessity—"civilized" Europeans governing "ignorant" Africans and indigenous people.

VII. The Structures in Place by 1822

When Brazil became independent in 1822, the Portuguese had spent 322 years building and perfecting an extraction system. Understanding what existed by 1822 is essential to understanding why independence didn't break the system.

Land Ownership Structure

Concentration: Approximately 2,000-3,000 families controlled virtually all productive agricultural land in coastal and southern Brazil—perhaps 90-95% of land that could be used for export agriculture.

Legal framework: The sesmaria system had distributed this land through royal grants, creating legal title that would be recognized after independence.

Geographic distribution:

- Sugar zone (Northeast): Controlled by 800-1,200 senhor families
- Coffee zone (Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo): Controlled by 400-600 planter families
- Cattle ranching (South/Minas Gerais): Controlled by 300-500 rancher families
- Mining (Minas Gerais): Mineral rights held by elite families
- Interior: Largely unclaimed or held by recent grantees pushing frontiers

Legitimacy: These families considered their land ownership legitimate, earned through development of "wilderness," and sanctioned by Crown grants. They would defend this ownership after independence.

Enslaved Population

Scale: Approximately 1.5-2.0 million people were enslaved in Brazil in 1822—roughly 30-35% of the total population of 4.5-5.0 million.

Distribution:

- Rural plantations (sugar, coffee, cotton): 60-65% of enslaved people
- Mining: 5-10%
- Urban (domestic service, artisans, dock workers): 15-20%
- Ranching and other: 10-15%

Racial composition: Approximately 80-85% African-born or of recent African descent, 15-20% born in Brazil (crioulos).

Economic value: At market prices in 1820s, the enslaved population represented wealth of approximately 300,000-400,000 contos de réis—by far the largest concentration of capital in Brazil, vastly exceeding the value of land or equipment.

Ownership distribution: Perhaps 60,000-80,000 people owned slaves (about 1.5-2% of population). But ownership was highly concentrated—the largest 5,000-8,000 slave owners (top 10% of owners) owned approximately 60-70% of all slaves.

Legal status: Slaves were property under Portuguese law. This property right was absolute and would be defended vigorously by owners after independence.

The Racial Hierarchy

By 1822, Brazil had developed a complex racial hierarchy:

Top: Portuguese-descended whites (1-2% of population): Controlled land, slaves, government, military, Church. Monopolized wealth and power.

Upper-middle: Brazilian-born whites (8-10% of population): Owned some land and slaves, held positions in government and military, but subordinate to Portuguese-born.

Middle: Free mulatto (mixed race) population (15-20% of population): Worked as overseers, artisans, small farmers, militia soldiers. Had some property and legal rights but faced discrimination.

Lower-middle: Free Black population (8-12% of population): Mostly poor, working as laborers, servants, marginal farmers. Had legal freedom but limited opportunity.

Bottom: Enslaved population (30-35% of population): Owned as property, no legal rights, subject to violence and sale.

Outside: Unconquered indigenous peoples (5-10% of population): Maintained autonomy in interior regions beyond Portuguese control.

This hierarchy was legally codified, culturally enforced, and violently maintained. It would persist after independence because the legal structures protecting it persisted.

The Economic Model

Brazil's economy in 1822 was organized around extraction for export:

Primary exports:

- Sugar: Still the largest export by value, 40-45% of exports
- Cotton: 15-20% of exports, particularly from Northeast
- Coffee: Growing rapidly, 10-15% of exports by 1822
- Gold/diamonds: Declining but still significant, 10-15% of exports
- Hides/leather: 5-10% of exports from southern cattle zones
- Other (tobacco, cacao, etc.): 5-10% of exports

Total export value: Approximately 20,000-25,000 contos de réis per year in early 1820s.

Import dependence: Brazil imported virtually all manufactured goods—cloth, tools, weapons, luxury items—from Britain and other European sources. The economy was designed to export raw materials and import finished goods.

Internal market: Minimal. Most Brazilians produced little for market beyond subsistence. Enslaved people received nothing. Free poor had little purchasing power. Only the elite had significant income to spend.

Capital accumulation: Wealth accumulated in elite hands through export profits. This capital was invested in more land, more slaves, and urban real estate—not in industry or infrastructure.

Violence Monopoly

The capacity for organized violence was monopolized by the colonial state and elite:

Regular army: Small—perhaps 5,000-8,000 troops in 1822, mostly infantry, concentrated in cities.

Militia: Organized military units totaling 30,000-40,000 men, recruited from free population, commanded by elite officers. These units could suppress revolts and defend against foreign invasion.

Ordenanças: Territorial forces of perhaps 50,000-80,000 men, less organized but available for local defense and slave-catching.

Private militias: Many large plantation owners maintained armed retainers—perhaps 20-100 armed men per estate—for local security and slave control.

Police: Minimal formal police. Law enforcement was handled by military units and local militias under elite control.

Enslaved people: Prohibited from owning weapons, forming military units, or organizing armed groups. Any enslaved person found with weapons faced severe punishment.

This monopoly on organized violence was essential to maintaining the extraction system. Enslaved people outnumbered free people in many regions. Only the elite's control of weapons, military organization, and state violence prevented successful large-scale revolts.

The Elite Network

By 1822, the Brazilian elite formed a coherent class with shared interests:

Interconnected families: The senhor de engenho families of Pernambuco, the coffee planters of Rio de Janeiro, the cattle ranchers of Rio Grande do Sul, the mining families of Minas Gerais—these were often literally related through marriage or connected through business partnerships.

Shared ideology: The elite believed in racial hierarchy (European superiority), property rights (especially slave ownership), Catholic orthodoxy, and their right to govern. These beliefs unified them despite regional differences.

Political representation: Elite families dominated municipal councils and had access to Portuguese colonial administrators. After independence, they would dominate the new Brazilian state.

Economic interests: The elite depended on slavery, land concentration, and export agriculture. Anything threatening these interests threatened all of them. This created incentive for coordination.

Cultural markers: Elite families spoke Portuguese (not just Crioulo), dressed in European fashion, educated their children (even if minimally), and practiced Catholicism visibly. These cultural markers separated them from the masses.

When independence came in 1822, this elite was positioned to capture the new state. They controlled the land, the slaves, the military, the economy. They had coordinated networks and shared interests. Most importantly, they had no interest in dismantling the extraction system that enriched them.

VIII. The 1822 Independence: Elite Preservation, Not Popular Liberation

The Independence Context

Brazilian independence in 1822 was not a popular revolution or a liberation movement. It was an elite-led separation from Portugal designed to preserve the extraction system, not transform it.

The Napoleonic context:

In 1808, Napoleon's armies invaded Portugal. The Portuguese royal court—King João VI, Queen Carlota Joaquina, their children including Prince Pedro, the entire government, and approximately 15,000 nobles, officials, and servants—fled to Brazil aboard British ships.

Rio de Janeiro suddenly became the capital of the Portuguese Empire. The royal court's arrival brought significant changes: Ports opened to international trade (ending Portuguese monopoly), printing press allowed, Bank of Brazil established, cultural institutions created.

But the fundamental extraction system continued. The royal court depended on Brazilian export revenues and tax on slaves. The senhores de engenho maintained their power. Slavery continued.

Portuguese liberalism and Brazilian reaction:

In 1820, a liberal revolution in Portugal overthrew absolutism and established a constitutional monarchy. The Portuguese Cortes (parliament) summoned King João VI back to Portugal and demanded that Brazil return to colonial status—subordinate to Portugal, with trade restrictions restored.

Brazilian elite rejected this. They had grown accustomed to direct trade with Britain and other nations. They resented subordination to Portugal. But they wanted independence on their terms—preserving slavery, land concentration, and their power.

Pedro I and Elite Independence

Prince Pedro (João VI's son) remained in Brazil as regent when his father returned to Portugal in 1821. The Portuguese Cortes demanded Pedro return as well. Brazilian elite convinced him to stay and lead independence.

On September 7, 1822, Pedro declared Brazil independent with the famous "Ipiranga Cry" (Grito do Ipiranga). Brazil became an independent empire with Pedro I as emperor.

Who led independence: Elite planters, merchants, military officers—the same people who had controlled colonial Brazil.

What they wanted: Independence from Portugal but preservation of internal hierarchy and extraction.

What they achieved: A constitutional monarchy that protected slavery, property rights, and elite power.

The 1824 Constitution: Codifying Extraction

Brazil's first constitution (March 1824) protected the extraction system through explicit provisions:

Slavery protected: The constitution didn't mention slavery directly, but property rights were guaranteed, and slaves were property. No emancipation, no redistribution.

Voting restricted: Only men with property and income above certain thresholds could vote. This excluded 90-95% of the population—women, slaves, indigenous people, and poor free men. The elite monopolized political power.

Emperor's power: Pedro I had extensive powers—could dissolve parliament, appoint senators, control military, veto legislation. This prevented democratic threats to elite interests.

Property rights absolute: The constitution guaranteed property rights (including slave ownership) against confiscation or redistribution.

Catholic state: Catholicism was the official religion. Other religions could be practiced privately but not publicly. The Church-state alliance continued.

No land reform: The constitution contained no provisions for land redistribution or limits on land concentration.

What Didn't Change

Independence preserved every element of the extraction system:

Land: The same families who owned estates in 1822 owned them in 1823. Sesmaria grants were recognized as legal title. Zero redistribution.

Slavery: 1.5-2.0 million people remained enslaved. Slave trade continued (illegally after 1831 but widely practiced until 1850). Abolition wouldn't come until 1888.

Racial hierarchy: Legal and social hierarchy remained unchanged. Portuguese-descended whites at top, mulatto middle, Black bottom. Zero equality.

Economic model: Export agriculture continued. Sugar, cotton, coffee cultivation expanded. Manufactured goods still imported. Zero diversification.

Violence monopoly: Elite maintained control of military and police. Enslaved people remained disarmed. Zero democratization of force.

Education: Literacy remained restricted to elite. No public education system created. Zero mass education.

Elite power: The same families who controlled colonial Brazil controlled independent Brazil. They dominated parliament, provincial governments, judiciary, military. Zero power transfer.

Why This Mattered

The nature of Brazilian independence—elite-led preservation rather than popular liberation—determined everything that followed.

When independence is led by elites protecting their interests, the extraction system persists because the elites design the new state to protect that system. The legal framework, property rights, voting restrictions, military control—all continued to serve extraction.

Compare to situations where independence comes through popular revolution or liberation movements that break elite power. In those cases, land can be redistributed, education can be expanded, violence can be democratized. Transformation becomes possible.

Brazil in 1822 had no such moment. The senhores de engenho of 1821 were the senhores de engenho of 1823. The slaves of 1821 were still slaves in 1823. The land concentration of 1821 persisted in 1823.

Independence changed who collected taxes (Brazil not Portugal) and who controlled international trade (Brazilian elite not Portuguese monopoly). But it didn't change who owned the land, who owned the people, who held power, or who benefited from extraction.

The structures that mattered—land ownership, slavery, racial hierarchy, violence monopoly, education restriction, elite coordination—all persisted. This is why Brazilian independence didn't break the extraction pattern established 1500-1822. The elites who captured independence had no interest in breaking a system that enriched them.

Conclusion: Three Centuries of Foundation

By 1822, Brazil had been shaped by 322 years of Portuguese extraction. The system built during those centuries had several essential characteristics:

Land concentration: A few thousand families controlled virtually all productive land through royal grants that seized indigenous territories.

Slavery: Forced labor by millions of Africans and indigenous people generated wealth for elite owners who provided no compensation.

Racial hierarchy: Legal and cultural systems placed Portuguese-descended whites at top, mixed-race free people in middle, and enslaved Africans at bottom, with indigenous people either exterminated or pushed to margins.

Violence: Organized violence was monopolized by colonial state and elite, used to suppress resistance, maintain slavery, and enforce hierarchy.

Extraction for export: The entire economy was organized to extract sugar, gold, cotton, coffee, and other commodities for European markets while importing manufactured goods.

Education restriction: Literacy and formal education were limited to elite children, keeping the vast majority ignorant and dependent.

Elite coordination: Interconnected families with shared interests controlled politics, economy, and violence, ensuring their collective power persisted.

These weren't accidents or temporary conditions. They were deliberately constructed systems maintained over centuries. The Portuguese Crown granted land to create elite loyalty. The slave trade was organized and taxed by the state. The violence apparatus was designed to prevent resistance. The education restrictions kept the majority subordinate.

When independence came in 1822, these structures didn't break because independence was led by the elite who benefited from them. The senhores de engenho, cattle ranchers, coffee planters, and mining magnates captured the independence movement and designed the new Brazilian state to protect their interests.

Part 2 will examine what happened during the first century of independence (1822-1930): How slavery persisted until 1888 despite international pressure. How "abolition" occurred without land redistribution, leaving freed people landless and impoverished. How coffee replaced sugar as the dominant export crop but the plantation system remained identical. How European immigration was used to replace slave labor while maintaining racial hierarchy. And how the "Old Republic" (1889-1930) perfected elite extraction through coronelismo and export agriculture while the majority remained poor, landless, and politically excluded.

The pattern established 1500-1822 would persist because the structures persisted. Changing the flag from Portuguese to Brazilian didn't change who owned the land, who owned the people, or who held power. That's what the evidence from 1822-1930 will show.

End of Part 1

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Statistical Note:

Population and economic statistics for colonial Brazil are estimates based on fragmentary records. Different scholars provide different numbers. This case study uses middle-range estimates from the most recent scholarship. Where significant uncertainty exists, ranges are provided rather than precise figures.

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Part: 1 of 4

Brazil: From Plantation Colony to Agribusiness Republic

Part 2 of 4: Independence Without Liberation (1822-1930)

Abolition Without Land, Coffee Without Change

Introduction: The Opportunity That Wasn't

Brazilian independence in 1822 created a moment when transformation could have occurred. A new state was being built. Political institutions were being designed. Economic policies were being established. The extraction system perfected over 322 years of Portuguese colonialism could have been dismantled.

It wasn't.

Between 1822 and 1930—108 years—Brazil maintained and refined the plantation extraction system. Slavery persisted for 66 years after independence (1822-1888). When abolition finally came, it occurred without land redistribution, leaving 700,000 freed people landless and impoverished. Coffee replaced sugar as the dominant export crop, but the plantation system remained identical. European immigrants were brought in by the millions to replace African slave labor while maintaining racial hierarchy. The Old Republic (1889-1930) perfected extraction through coronelismo—a system of rural bosses controlling politics through violence and patronage.

By 1930, the fundamental patterns established 1500-1822 persisted: Land remained concentrated in elite families. Racial hierarchy remained intact with whites at top and Blacks at bottom. Violence monopoly remained with landowners and state forces. Education remained restricted to elites. Export agriculture remained the economic foundation. Elite networks remained coordinated.

This part examines why and how this continuity occurred. It covers three major periods: The Empire period (1822-1889) when slavery persisted and coffee expanded; the Abolition moment (1888) when legal freedom came without economic transformation; and the Old Republic (1889-1930) when electoral politics coexisted with rural extraction.

The central finding: Independence led by elites preserves extraction because elites design the new state to protect their interests. Abolition without asset redistribution provides legal freedom but maintains economic subordination. Democracy without structural change becomes ritualistic rather than transformative.

What happened to average Brazilians during these 108 years reveals the pattern. Enslaved people remained enslaved until 1888, then became landless workers. Indigenous people continued to be pushed inland and exterminated. Free poor remained landless, illiterate, and politically excluded. Only the elite minority—the plantation families of 1822—prospered across the entire period.

I. Empire Period: Preserving Slavery (1822-1850)

The Empire's Foundation

When Pedro I declared Brazil independent on September 7, 1822, he created a constitutional monarchy that explicitly protected the extraction system. The 1824 Constitution established a government designed to serve elite interests:

The Emperor's powers: Pedro I (and later Pedro II after 1831) had extraordinary authority—could dissolve parliament, appoint senators for life, veto legislation, control military, appoint provincial presidents. This concentrated power prevented democratic challenges to slavery or land concentration.

Voting restrictions: Only men over 25 with annual income above 100 mil-réis could vote in primary elections (approximately 1-2% of population). Only those with income above 200 mil-réis could be elected to Chamber of Deputies (perhaps 0.5% of population). Senators had to have income above 800 mil-réis (perhaps 0.1% of population).

These income thresholds excluded:

- All slaves (no legal rights)
- All women (excluded by gender)
- Free poor men (no sufficient income)
- Most urban workers and artisans
- Small farmers

Result: Perhaps 50,000-100,000 men could vote in a population of 5 million (1-2%). Perhaps 2,000-5,000 men could hold national office.

Property rights protected: The constitution guaranteed property rights against confiscation. Since slaves were property, this protected slavery. No compensation was provided for abolition when it eventually came in 1888, but also no land redistribution occurred.

Catholic state: Catholicism remained official religion. The Church continued its alliance with the state and plantation elite, providing ideological justification for hierarchy.

Provincial administration: Provincial presidents were appointed by the Emperor, not elected. This prevented regional challenges to imperial authority or elite interests.

The Slave Trade Continues (1822-1850)

Despite international pressure and British efforts to end the Atlantic slave trade, Brazil continued importing enslaved Africans for decades after independence:

Legal prohibition without enforcement:

In 1826, Brazil signed a treaty with Britain promising to end the slave trade by 1830. In 1831, the Brazilian government passed a law making slave importation illegal.

But enforcement was minimal. Brazilian elites needed labor. Coffee plantations were expanding rapidly in Rio de Janeiro province and southern Minas Gerais during the 1830s-1840s. These plantations required thousands of workers. The elite had no intention of ending their labor supply.

The illegal trade (1831-1850):

Between 1831-1850, approximately 500,000-750,000 enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil illegally. Ships would land at isolated beaches, unload captives, and the new slaves would be marched to interior plantations. Brazilian authorities either looked the other way or were complicit—many officials owned plantations themselves.

British naval vessels patrolled the Brazilian coast attempting to intercept slave ships. They captured some vessels, but most got through. The profits from slave sales were enormous—large enough to make the risk worthwhile even if some ships were captured.

Who bought these slaves:

Coffee planters in Rio de Janeiro province and São Paulo were the primary purchasers. Coffee cultivation was expanding explosively during the 1830s-1840s:

Coffee production:

- 1821: ~100,000 bags (60 kg each)
- 1831: ~250,000 bags
- 1841: ~500,000 bags
- 1851: ~1,000,000 bags

Each doubling of production required thousands of additional workers. The planters bought illegally imported slaves and worked them on coffee estates using the same plantation system perfected for sugar in the Northeast.

The 1850 end:

In 1850, Brazil finally enforced the slave trade prohibition. British pressure had intensified—the Royal Navy was authorized to enter Brazilian waters and seize slave ships. More importantly, Brazilian elites began to worry that continued slave importation would provoke British military intervention or damage Brazil's international standing.

The Eusébio de Queirós Law (September 1850) ended the Atlantic slave trade to Brazil. Naval patrols increased. Courts began prosecuting traders. The flow of new slaves stopped.

Impact on slavery:

Ending the trade didn't end slavery. In 1850, Brazil had approximately 2.5 million enslaved people—the largest enslaved population in the Americas. These people remained enslaved. Their children would be born into slavery (until the 1871 Free Womb Law). The internal slave trade intensified—slaves from declining sugar regions in the Northeast were sold to expanding coffee regions in the Southeast.

Slavery would persist for another 38 years (1850-1888) without new imports.

Coffee Expansion and the Internal Slave Trade

When the external slave trade ended in 1850, Brazilian planters adapted by buying slaves from other regions:

The internal trade pattern:

Selling regions: Northeast (Pernambuco, Bahia, Maranhão) where sugar production was declining or stagnant. Slaves were surplus in these areas.

Buying regions: Southeast (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, southern Minas Gerais) where coffee production was exploding. Slaves were desperately needed.

Scale: Between 1850-1881, approximately 200,000-300,000 slaves were moved from Northeast to Southeast through internal trade. Families were separated. People were marched hundreds of kilometers. The trade was legal and profitable for sellers.

Prices: Slave prices increased sharply after 1850. In 1840s Rio de Janeiro, a prime-age male slave cost 500-700 mil-réis. By 1860s, the price was 1,500-2,000 mil-réis. By 1870s, 2,000-3,000 mil-réis. The rising prices reflected scarcity (no new imports) and demand (coffee boom).

Coffee plantation system:

The coffee fazenda (plantation) replicated the sugar engenho system with minor adaptations:

Layout:

- Casa-grande: Master's house on elevated ground
- Senzala: Slave quarters (barracks or rows of huts)
- Coffee processing: Drying yards, storage buildings, processing equipment
- Fields: Coffee trees planted in rows on hillsides

Labor organization:

- Field gangs: 60-70% of slaves, planted seedlings, weeded, harvested coffee cherries
- Processing workers: 15-20%, operated drying yards and processing equipment
- Domestic workers: 10-15%, worked in casa-grande
- Skilled workers: 5%, blacksmiths, carpenters, drivers

Work routine:

- Harvest season (May-September): 14-16 hour days, seven days per week
- Non-harvest: 10-12 hour days, six days per week
- Sundays: Theoretically rest, but slaves often had to work their own provision plots to grow food

Violence and control:

Coffee fazendeiros used the same control methods as sugar senhores:

- Whipping for perceived infractions
- Separation of families as punishment
- Sale to distant plantations as ultimate threat
- Sexual exploitation of women and girls
- Physical punishment and occasional killing

The only structural difference: Coffee fazendas tended to be somewhat smaller than sugar engenhos (30-80 slaves vs. 80-150) because coffee processing was less capital-intensive than sugar mills. But the exploitation and violence were identical.

Free Labor Experiments and Immigration Begins

As slave prices rose in the 1850s-1860s and international pressure against slavery mounted, some planters began experimenting with European immigrant labor:

Early experiments (1840s-1850s):

Some São Paulo coffee planters recruited Swiss, German, and Portuguese immigrants under contract (colonato) arrangements. The immigrants would work for fixed wages or sharecropping arrangements, supposedly as free labor.

These early experiments mostly failed. Immigrants faced:

- Debt bondage: Passage costs and initial expenses created debts that took years to repay
- Isolation: Many colonies were remote with no alternative employment
- Violence: Some planters treated immigrants like slaves, using physical punishment
- Broken promises: Wages often unpaid, contracts violated

Many immigrants fled to cities or returned to Europe. Word spread that Brazilian plantation labor was barely better than slavery.

The 1850s-1860s assessment:

Coffee planters recognized that major immigration would require:

- Government subsidies for passage (planters didn't want to pay)
- Better treatment than slavery (to attract immigrants)
- Gradual transition (immediate abolition would cause labor crisis)

But most planters in the 1850s-1860s still preferred slavery. Slaves could be controlled through violence, couldn't leave, and represented capital investment that could be sold if needed.

The Paraguayan War (1864-1870) and Its Impact

The War of the Triple Alliance (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay vs. Paraguay, 1864-1870) had unexpected consequences for Brazilian slavery:

Black soldiers:

Brazil drafted extensively during the war. Approximately 20,000-30,000 slaves fought for Brazil, with many promised freedom after service. Free Black and mulatto men also served in large numbers.

Military service and freedom:

The Brazilian army freed some slaves who fought, though not all. The spectacle of Black soldiers fighting for Brazil while slavery persisted created ideological contradictions. How could enslaved men defend the nation while being denied citizenship?

Casualties:

The war killed approximately 50,000-100,000 Brazilians (exact numbers uncertain due to poor records). This included many slaves who were never freed despite promises. Some planters sent slaves to fight as substitutes for their own sons, then denied freedom after the war.

Political impact:

The war's costs and casualties strengthened the abolitionist movement. Intellectuals argued that a modern nation couldn't be built on slavery. Military officers resented being expected to hunt runaway slaves while defending the nation. The war exposed contradictions in maintaining slavery while claiming to be a civilized nation.

The Empire Under Pedro II

Pedro II ruled Brazil from 1831 (age 5, through regents initially) to 1889 (abdication). His 58-year reign provided remarkable political stability—but stability that preserved extraction:

Pedro II's character:

Unlike his father Pedro I (who was dissolute and autocratic), Pedro II was scholarly, moderate, and genuinely interested in modernization. He patronized arts and sciences, corresponded with European intellectuals, and supported some social reforms.

But he protected slavery until international and domestic pressure became overwhelming. He owned slaves himself (though he freed them in 1840s). He appointed conservative governments that defended planters' interests. He used the Moderating Power (constitutional authority to dissolve parliament) to prevent abolitionist legislation.

Why Pedro II protected slavery:

The coffee elite supported the empire. They provided tax revenues, maintained order in rural areas, and staffed government positions. The empire depended on their cooperation. Abolishing slavery without compensation would alienate this crucial elite.

Pedro II genuinely believed gradual reform was preferable to immediate abolition. He feared that sudden abolition would cause:

- Economic collapse (coffee production dependent on slave labor)
- Social chaos (700,000+ freed people with no resources)
- Elite rebellion (planters might overthrow empire)

So he delayed. And delayed. For decades.

Gradual emancipation measures:

The empire implemented minimal reforms that looked progressive but preserved slavery's core:

1871 - Law of the Free Womb (Lei do Ventre Livre):

Children born to enslaved mothers after September 28, 1871 would be free. But:

- They remained with masters until age 8

- Masters could choose: Free them at 8 with compensation from government, OR keep them until age 21 as unpaid servants
- Most masters chose to keep children until 21
- By 1885, only 118 children had been freed at age 8; approximately 400,000 remained in servitude

This law let the empire claim progress while barely affecting slavery. It would take 30-40 years to phase out slavery through "natural" generational replacement—far too slow.

1885 - Sexagenarian Law (Lei dos Sexagenários):

Slaves over age 60 would be freed. But:

- Very few slaves survived to 60 (life expectancy for slaves was perhaps 30-40 years)
- Freed slaves had no pension, no support—just expelled from plantations
- By 1887, only 8,000-10,000 were freed under this law

This law freed the elderly and infirm whom planters no longer wanted to support, while keeping prime-age workers enslaved.

These gradual measures let Pedro II claim he supported abolition while actually protecting slavery. Between 1871-1888, the enslaved population decreased from 1.5 million to 700,000—but this was mostly through death, illegal manumission schemes to avoid compensation, and planters preparing for inevitable abolition by freeing old or sick slaves early.

II. The Abolition That Wasn't (1888)

The Abolitionist Movement Intensifies

By the 1880s, multiple forces were converging to end slavery:

Urban abolitionism:

Cities—particularly Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Recife—developed abolitionist movements among intellectuals, lawyers, journalists, students, and middle-class professionals. Key figures:

Joaquim Nabuco: Pernambuco politician and intellectual, wrote *O Abolicionismo* (1883) arguing slavery was incompatible with civilization and economic progress.

José do Patrocínio: Mulatto journalist from Rio de Janeiro, founded abolitionist newspapers and organized direct action.

Luís Gama: Black lawyer in São Paulo who freed hundreds of slaves through legal challenges, arguing they had been illegally enslaved after 1831 trade prohibition.

André Rebouças: Black engineer and intellectual, advocated abolition plus land reform (though land reform was ignored).

These urban abolitionists organized:

- Newspapers and pamphlets attacking slavery
- Public speeches and demonstrations
- Legal challenges freeing individual slaves
- Underground railroad helping slaves escape

Slave resistance:

Enslaved people themselves intensified resistance in the 1880s:

Mass escapes: Thousands of slaves fled plantations, particularly in São Paulo coffee region. Some headed to cities where abolitionists hid them. Others formed quilombos. The scale overwhelmed slave-catching forces.

Work slowdowns: Slaves worked deliberately slowly or poorly, reducing productivity.

Occasional violence: Some slaves attacked overseers or masters. These incidents terrified planters.

Military refusal:

By 1887, Brazilian military officers were refusing to hunt escaped slaves. They argued that the army's role was national defense, not slave-catching for private owners. This was catastrophic for planters—without military support, they couldn't control slave populations.

International pressure:

Brazil was the last major slaveholding nation in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba had abolished slavery in 1886. The United States had abolished it in 1865. Brazil's continued slavery was an international embarrassment that damaged trade relations and cultural standing.

Economic factors:

Some planters—particularly in São Paulo where European immigration was already significant—calculated that free immigrant labor might be cheaper than slave labor if managed correctly. Rising slave prices (2,000-3,000 mil-réis by 1880s) made slavery expensive. Some planters quietly prepared for abolition by diversifying labor sources.

Regional divisions:

São Paulo coffee planters were somewhat open to abolition because they had access to immigrant labor. But Northeast sugar planters—who had sold their slaves to São Paulo in the

internal trade and now had fewer resources—resisted fiercely. This regional split weakened pro-slavery forces.

May 13, 1888: The Golden Law

On May 13, 1888, Princess Isabel (serving as regent while Pedro II was in Europe) signed the Lei Áurea (Golden Law) abolishing slavery immediately and unconditionally throughout Brazil.

The law was remarkably brief—two articles:

Article 1: "Slavery is declared extinct in Brazil from this law's date."

Article 2: "All contrary provisions are revoked."

That was it. No compensation for owners. No land for freed people. No education programs. No employment guarantees. No transition period. Just: You are free. Now figure out how to survive.

Immediate reactions:

Urban celebration: Cities erupted in celebration. Freed people danced in streets. Abolitionists celebrated victory. Middle-class Brazilians congratulated themselves on enlightened progress.

Rural reality: On plantations, freed people faced immediate crises:

- Where to live? (Most lived in senzalas on master's property)
- How to eat? (No land to grow food, no money to buy food)
- Where to work? (Only work available was on same plantations, now as wage laborers)

Planter responses varied:

Some planters immediately negotiated wage labor contracts with freed people, offering minimal pay but housing and provision plots.

Some expelled freed people from property, forcing them to find shelter elsewhere.

Some attempted to maintain slavery in practice—offering "contracts" that were actually debt bondage.

Some simply continued working freed people without pay, counting on their desperation and lack of alternatives.

What Abolition Didn't Include

The critical omissions from abolition reveal why it didn't break the extraction system:

No land redistribution:

Zero land was redistributed to freed people. The 2,000-3,000 elite families who owned 90-95% of agricultural land in 1888 still owned it in 1889. The fazendeiros who had extracted wealth from slave labor for decades kept all accumulated wealth and all land.

Freed people were left landless. They could:

- Stay on plantations as wage laborers (most common, paid perhaps 500-800 réis per day—barely enough to survive)
- Move to cities looking for work (many did, creating urban slums)
- Try to squat on unused land (usually expelled by landowner militias)
- Starve

No compensation or reparations:

The 700,000 freed people received nothing. No money. No tools. No animals. No housing. No food supplies. Nothing.

They had spent lifetimes generating wealth for owners—sugar, coffee, gold, built houses, cleared land, created infrastructure. The accumulated value was immeasurable. They received zero compensation for this stolen labor.

No education programs:

The government created no schools for freed people. Literacy remained restricted to elites. The freed people remained illiterate and therefore politically excluded (voting required literacy under 1889 Republican constitution).

By 1890, literacy rate among freed people was estimated at 1-3%. This kept them subordinate for another generation.

No economic support:

No jobs programs, no credit access, no technical training, no business support. Freed people entered the labor market with no capital, no skills recognized by wage economy, and no networks outside plantations.

No political rights (initially):

The 1891 Republican constitution (see next section) restricted voting to literate males. This excluded virtually all freed people, plus most free poor. Abolition gave legal freedom but not political power.

The Labor Transition: Slavery to Near-Slavery

What happened to the 700,000 freed people in 1888-1900 reveals how abolition without land maintained extraction:

Rural workers (approximately 60-70% of freed people):

Most freed people remained in rural areas, many on the same plantations where they had been enslaved:

Wage labor contracts: Planters offered daily wages (500-800 réis per day in 1890s) plus housing in old senzalas and small provision plots. The pay was barely sufficient for food, clothing, and minimal necessities. Workers had no savings, no capital accumulation, no path to land ownership.

Colonato system: Some coffee planters (particularly in São Paulo) implemented colonato—a payment system mixing wages, sharecropping, and provision plots. Immigrant families received so much per 1,000 coffee trees to care for, plus plots to grow food, plus wages for harvest work. This system became dominant in São Paulo by 1900s.

But freed people were largely excluded from colonato. Planters preferred European immigrants, believing they were more "civilized" and harder working. Freed people were relegated to day labor.

Sharecropping: In some regions (particularly Northeast), freed people sharecropped—working land for share of crop (usually 50/50 or worse). But the landowner provided land, seeds, tools (all on credit at high interest). The sharecropper provided labor. At harvest, the landowner took his share plus debt repayment. Most sharecroppers ended each year in debt, trapped in debt bondage.

Conditions for rural freed people 1888-1900:

- Housing: Often old senzalas or minimal shacks
- Food: Manioc flour, beans, occasional dried meat—subsistence diet
- Health: No medical care, high infant mortality, parasitic diseases endemic
- Education: No schools, children worked in fields
- Mobility: Theoretically free to leave, but no alternatives meant staying put
- Violence: Landowners maintained private militias; workers who challenged authority faced beating or murder

Urban migrants (approximately 30-40% of freed people):

Many freed people left plantations and moved to cities hoping for better opportunities:

What they found:

Slums: Cities had no housing for sudden population influx. Freed people built shacks on hillsides or swamps—creating favelas in Rio de Janeiro, cortiços in São Paulo, mocambos in Recife.

Informal economy: Most work was informal—street vending, dock loading, domestic service, laundering, small-scale artisan work. Pay was minimal and irregular.

Racial discrimination: European immigrants were preferred for formal employment. Freed Black people faced systematic discrimination in hiring.

Police harassment: Cities increased police forces to control "dangerous classes"—meaning poor Black populations. Police could arrest for vagrancy, breaking up families and forcing people into prison labor.

Conditions for urban freed people 1888-1900:

- Housing: Favelas, tenements, illegal squatter settlements
- Income: Irregular, mostly informal economy, no job security
- Health: Worse than rural areas—crowding, poor sanitation, epidemic diseases
- Education: Minimal; some children attended charity schools
- Police violence: Constant harassment, arbitrary arrests, beatings

The Numbers: Abolition's Non-Impact on Inequality

Statistics from 1890 (two years after abolition) and 1900 reveal the continuity:

Land ownership (1890-1900):

Elite families: The approximately 3,000-4,000 families who owned plantations in 1888 still owned them in 1900. Many expanded holdings by purchasing land from bankrupted planters during 1890s coffee crisis.

Ex-slaves: By 1900, fewer than 5% of freed people or their children owned any land. Those who did owned tiny plots (1-5 hectares) unsuitable for commercial agriculture.

Estimate: Elite families controlled 85-90% of agricultural land in 1900—roughly the same as 1850.

Wealth distribution (1900 estimates):

Top 1%: Controlled 60-70% of total wealth (land, urban property, commercial assets, financial assets)

Next 9%: Controlled 20-25% of wealth (small planters, merchants, professionals, military officers)

Bottom 90%: Controlled 5-15% of wealth (small farmers, workers, ex-slaves)

Former slaves and descendants: Controlled <2% of national wealth despite being ~15% of population

Income distribution (1900 estimates):

Plantation owners: Annual income 10,000-100,000 mil-réis or more for large planters

Urban professionals: Annual income 2,000-10,000 mil-réis

Rural wage workers (ex-slaves): Annual income 150-300 mil-réis (500-800 réis per day × ~200-300 work days)

Urban informal workers (ex-slaves): Annual income 100-250 mil-réis (irregular work)

Income ratio: Plantation owners earned 50-500 times what former slaves earned. This was similar to slave-owner vs. free-poor ratios before abolition.

Literacy rates (1890 census):

White men: 25-30% literate

White women: 10-15% literate

Free mulatto men: 10-15% literate

Free mulatto women: 3-5% literate

Freed Black men: 1-3% literate

Freed Black women: <1% literate

National average: ~15% literate

Literacy gap meant political exclusion. The 1891 constitution required literacy for voting. Most freed people couldn't vote.

Why Abolition Didn't Break Extraction

The 1888 abolition failed to break the extraction system because it addressed legal status (slavery) without addressing material structures (land ownership, capital access, education, political power):

Legal freedom without economic freedom:

Freed people were legally free to leave plantations, change employers, move to cities. But freedom without resources meant limited practical options. Staying on plantations as wage laborers was often the only viable choice.

Property rights protected:

Elite families kept land accumulated through 300+ years of slavery. No redistribution meant the wealth generated by enslaved labor remained with the families who had stolen it.

No compensatory policies:

Modern successful abolitions often include redistributive policies—land reform, education access, credit programs, employment guarantees. Brazil had none of this.

Racial hierarchy persisted:

Abolition ended legal slavery but didn't end racial discrimination. Freed Black people remained at the bottom of social hierarchy. European immigrants were systematically privileged over freed people in employment, education, and social status.

Elite power intact:

The same families who controlled Brazil before abolition controlled it after. They dominated politics, owned the land, controlled the economy, and could use state violence to maintain order.

The comparison that reveals the pattern:

Imagine a different 1888 abolition that included:

- Land redistribution: Each freed family receives 10-20 hectares
- Education: Government builds schools in every district
- Credit access: State bank provides loans for tools, seeds, animals
- Political rights: Universal suffrage regardless of literacy
- Reparations: Cash payments compensating decades of unpaid labor

This would have broken the extraction system. Freed people with land, education, capital, and political power could have transformed Brazil.

Instead, 1888 abolition gave legal freedom but maintained material subordination. The extraction system adapted—slave labor became near-slave wage labor—but continued.

III. The Old Republic: Coronelismo and Coffee Oligarchy (1889-1930)

The Republican Coup (1889)

On November 15, 1889, a military coup overthrew Emperor Pedro II and established the Brazilian Republic. But this was not a popular revolution or social transformation—it was an elite power consolidation.

Who led the coup:

Military officers: Led by Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca, military officers unhappy with Pedro II's interference in army affairs and angry about how the Paraguay War was handled.

Coffee planters: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro coffee fazendeiros who wanted federalism giving provinces (especially São Paulo) more autonomy and control over revenues.

Urban professionals: Middle-class lawyers, doctors, journalists who wanted modernization and saw the empire as archaic.

Positivists: Intellectuals influenced by Auguste Comte's positivism, believing in scientific progress and rational administration.

Not involved: Freed people, rural workers, urban poor, indigenous peoples—the majority had no say in the transition.

What they wanted:

The Republican coalition wanted political change (end monarchy) but not social revolution. They opposed:

- Land redistribution (would hurt coffee planters)
- Universal suffrage (would empower poor majority)
- Labor rights (would reduce planter control)
- Wealth redistribution (would hurt elite accumulation)

They supported:

- Federalism (giving rich provinces like São Paulo more power)
- Secular state (reducing Church influence)
- Liberal economic policies (free trade, foreign investment)
- Immigration (bringing European labor)
- Order and progress (military involvement in politics acceptable)

The 1891 Constitution: Democracy for the Elite

The Republic's first constitution (February 1891) created a democratic-looking system that actually preserved elite power:

Federalism:

Brazil became a federal republic (United States of Brazil). Provinces became states with significant autonomy. This empowered rich states (São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro) while weakening poor states (Northeast).

Presidential system:

President elected for four years, could not serve consecutive terms. Congress had two houses—Chamber of Deputies (elected) and Senate (elected). States had their own governors and legislatures.

Voting restrictions:

The constitution defined voters as:

- Male
- Over 21
- Literate (could read and write)
- Not military conscripts, monks, or beggars

Impact of literacy requirement:

In 1890, approximately 15% of population was literate. Among men over 21, perhaps 20-25% were literate. This excluded:

- Virtually all freed people (1-3% literacy)
- Most poor free people (illiteracy endemic)
- All women (explicitly excluded by gender)

Result: Perhaps 2-3% of total population could vote. In 1894 election, only 290,000 voted in population of 14 million (2%).

No secret ballot (until 1930):

Voting was public. Voters announced their choice or submitted marked ballots that could be identified. This enabled:

- Intimidation by coronéis (local bosses)
- Vote buying
- Electoral fraud
- Punishment for wrong votes

Property concentrated:

The constitution protected property rights. No land reform, no wealth redistribution, no limits on land concentration.

Racial hierarchy maintained:

The constitution didn't mention race (formally race-blind). But literacy requirements, police harassment, and informal discrimination maintained Black people at bottom of hierarchy.

Coffee and Milk Politics

From 1894-1930, Brazilian politics was dominated by an arrangement called "café com leite" (coffee with milk)—alternating presidency between São Paulo (coffee) and Minas Gerais (milk/dairy):

How it worked:

São Paulo and Minas Gerais were Brazil's most populous and wealthy states. Together they controlled enough electoral votes to determine presidential elections. They made an informal agreement:

- Presidential candidates would alternate between states
- Both states would support each other's candidates
- Federal policies would favor both states' interests
- Other states would receive patronage in exchange for support

Why it persisted:**São Paulo's dominance:**

São Paulo produced 60-70% of Brazil's coffee by 1900—the dominant export (50-70% of total exports). This gave São Paulo enormous economic power and tax revenue. São Paulo's coffee fazendeiros were Brazil's richest elite.

Minas Gerais's population:

Minas Gerais had the largest population of any state. This translated to most seats in Chamber of Deputies. Minas Gerais politicians could block legislation or deliver votes in presidential elections.

Joint interest:

Both states wanted:

- Federal support for coffee prices (valorization schemes)
- Immigration subsidies (labor supply)
- Infrastructure investment (railroads to ports)
- Political stability (no social revolution)
- Order (military suppression of unrest)

Other states:

Smaller, poorer states (mostly Northeast) had no alternative. They needed federal patronage to survive. They supported café com leite candidates in exchange for appointments, subsidies, and military support for local bosses.

Coronelismo: Rural Boss Rule

While the capital (Rio de Janeiro) had elections and parliament, the countryside was controlled through coronelismo—a system of local boss rule combining violence, patronage, and electoral manipulation:

The coronel (colonel):

The coronel was a large landowner (coffee fazendeiro, sugar senhor, cattle rancher) who controlled local politics in his município (county/district). The title "coronel" came from National Guard ranks that landowners purchased in Empire period.

Sources of power:

Land ownership: The coronel owned most land in his município—thousands or tens of thousands of hectares. This made most residents dependent on him for employment, housing, or land access.

Private militia: The coronel maintained armed retainers (jagunços or capangas)—perhaps 20-200 armed men depending on the coronel's wealth. These men enforced the coronel's will through violence.

State governor support: The coronel had patron-client relationship with state governor. The coronel delivered votes in elections; the governor provided:

- State police support when needed
- Appointments for coronel's relatives and allies
- State resources (roads, schools, public works) for coronel's município
- Legal immunity for coronel's violence

Federal patronage: Through governor connection, coronel accessed federal patronage—post office jobs, customs positions, military appointments.

How coronelismo worked in practice:

Electoral control:

During elections, the coronel would:

1. **Assemble workers:** Day before election, bring all workers/dependents to town and house them in fazenda buildings or corrals
2. **Distribute ballots:** Give each person a marked ballot (or tell them verbally whom to vote for)
3. **Monitor voting:** Station armed men at polling places to ensure compliance
4. **Punish defiance:** Anyone who voted "wrong" (opposition candidate) faced:
 - Eviction from land
 - Job loss
 - Beating by jagunços

- Possible murder
- 5. **Fabricate results:** If needed, simply invent vote totals. Local election officials were coronel's appointees or allies.

Social control:

Between elections, the coronel maintained order through:

Patronage: Providing jobs, small favors, godparent relationships (compadrio) that created obligations

Violence: Punishing challenges to authority—someone who insulted coronel, challenged boundary, demanded wages, organized workers

Dispute resolution: Acting as judge in local disputes (no real judicial access in rural areas)

Infrastructure provision: Building chapel, sponsoring festivals, providing minimal charity (while enriching himself vastly more)

Examples of coronel power:

Horácio de Matos (Bahia interior, 1900s-1930s): Controlled multiple municípios through private army of 1,000+ jagunços. Could mobilize military forces larger than state government's. Negotiated with governors as equal power. Maintained control until 1930s when Vargas regime eliminated him.

Francisco de Sá Peixoto (Minas Gerais, 1890s-1920s): Coffee fazendeiro controlling several municípios. Delivered 10,000+ votes reliably to café com leite candidates. In exchange, his relatives held state and federal positions. His jagunços murdered opponents without prosecution.

The system's resilience:

Coronelismo persisted because it served multiple interests:

State governors: Needed electoral support from interior; coronéis delivered votes

Federal government: Needed political stability; coronéis maintained order

Coronéis: Retained local power and accumulated wealth

Opposition parties: Often had their own coronéis in different municípios

Losers: Rural workers, small farmers, anyone dependent on coronel's goodwill

Coffee Valorization: Socializing Elite Losses

The Old Republic's defining economic policy was coffee valorization—government intervention to maintain coffee prices, protecting elite planters at public expense:

The problem:

Coffee production expanded rapidly 1889-1906:

- 1890: 5 million bags
- 1900: 10 million bags
- 1906: 20 million bags

Global demand grew more slowly. By 1906, oversupply threatened to crash prices. Planters faced potential losses.

The solution (for planters):

São Paulo state government (controlled by coffee planters) implemented Taubaté Accord (1906):

1. **Government purchases:** State government would buy "excess" coffee and withhold it from market
2. **Price support:** This reduced supply, maintaining prices
3. **Foreign loans:** São Paulo borrowed from foreign (mainly British) banks to finance purchases
4. **Storage:** Coffee was stored in warehouses until prices recovered
5. **Eventual sale:** When prices rose, stored coffee was sold, theoretically recovering costs

Impact:

Short term (1906-1914): Valorization worked. Prices stabilized. Planters avoided losses.

Who paid: Consumers (higher coffee prices), taxpayers (loan payments came from state/federal taxes), future generations (debt accumulation)

Long term: Valorization encouraged overproduction. Planters knew government would protect them from losses, so they planted more coffee. The problem worsened.

Pattern: Privatize profits (planters keep wealth from good years), socialize losses (government absorbs costs of bad years).

Immigration: Racial Replacement Strategy

Between 1870-1930, approximately 4-5 million European immigrants arrived in Brazil. This was not simply labor importation—it was a deliberate strategy to replace Black labor with white labor and "whiten" Brazil's population:

Immigration promotion:

The Brazilian government (particularly São Paulo state) subsidized immigration through:

Paid passage: Government paid ship fares from Europe (typically 100-200 mil-réis per person)

Land grants: Small plots offered in colonization schemes (though many never materialized)

Settlement support: Initial housing, tools, seeds (often inadequate)

Labor contracts: Government negotiated colonato contracts between immigrants and planters

Origins of immigrants (1870-1930):

Italians: 1.5-2.0 million (largest group), mostly to São Paulo coffee region

Portuguese: 1.2-1.5 million, spread across Brazil

Spanish: 700,000-900,000, mostly to São Paulo

Germans: 250,000-300,000, mostly to southern states

Japanese: 200,000-250,000 (1908-1930), mostly to São Paulo

Others: Eastern Europeans, Middle Easterners, etc.

Why promote European immigration:

The official rhetoric was economic—Brazil needed workers for coffee expansion. But the underlying motivations were racial:

"Whitening" ideology (branqueamento):

Brazilian elites embraced pseudo-scientific racism prevalent in late 1800s Europe. They believed:

- White races were superior to Black races
- Brazil's "backwardness" was caused by large Black population
- Importing white immigrants would "whiten" population through intermarriage
- After 2-3 generations, Black population would be "diluted" and Brazil would be "white" and therefore "civilized"

This ideology was explicit. Politicians, intellectuals, and government officials openly discussed immigration as racial improvement strategy.

Excluding freed people:

Immigration policy deliberately marginalized freed Black people:

Preference for immigrants: Planters received government subsidies to hire European immigrants but not to employ freed people or their descendants.

Discrimination in hiring: European immigrants were preferred for better-paid positions. Freed people were relegated to worst jobs.

Spatial segregation: Immigrants were settled in new areas (southern Brazil, interior São Paulo) while freed people concentrated in old plantation regions (Northeast) or urban favelas.

Wage discrimination: Immigrants earned 1.5-2.0 times what freed people earned for similar work.

The 1920s Crisis and Old Republic's End

By the 1920s, the Old Republic system was breaking down:

Economic problems:

Coffee overproduction: Despite valorization, production kept growing. By 1930, Brazil had 3-4 years' worth of coffee in warehouses.

Global depression: The 1929 crash destroyed coffee markets. Prices collapsed. Valorization schemes couldn't sustain prices.

Debt burden: São Paulo and federal government had borrowed heavily to finance valorization. Debt service consumed huge portion of revenues.

Industrial discontent:

São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro had developed industrial sectors by 1920s—textiles, food processing, light manufacturing. Industrial workers (many Italian immigrants) began organizing:

Strikes: 1917-1920 saw major strikes in São Paulo and Rio demanding better wages, shorter hours, and improved conditions.

Anarchist and socialist movements: Immigrant workers brought European radical ideologies. Labor organizing intensified.

Government response: Military and police violently suppressed strikes. Anarchist leaders were arrested or deported.

Military dissatisfaction:

Junior military officers (tenentes) became radicalized in 1920s:

Tenente revolts:

- 1922: Copacabana Fort revolt (suppressed)
- 1924: São Paulo revolt (suppressed after urban warfare)

- 1925-1927: Prestes Column (guerrilla march through interior, never defeated but didn't take power)

The tenentes wanted:

- End of oligarchic politics
- Secret ballot and honest elections
- National development and industrialization
- Reduced regional inequality
- Land reform (some tenentes, not all)

Regional resentment:

States excluded from café com leite system (Rio Grande do Sul, Paraíba, others) resented São Paulo-Minas Gerais dominance. They wanted political voice and federal resources.

The 1930 election and coup:

In 1930, São Paulo broke the café com leite agreement and insisted on electing another São Paulo president (Júlio Prestes) rather than alternating to Minas Gerais. Minas Gerais joined opposition alliance supporting Getúlio Vargas (Rio Grande do Sul governor).

When the sitting president declared Prestes the winner through obvious fraud, opposition forces (military units, Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais state forces, tenente groups) revolted. On October 24, 1930, Vargas took power in a coup that ended the Old Republic.

IV. What Happened to Average People (1822-1930)

Enslaved People's Experience (1822-1888)

For the 1.5-2.5 million people who lived in slavery during this period, conditions remained brutal:

Daily life on plantations:

Housing: Senzalas remained minimal—wooden or mud huts, earthen floors, no furniture, no privacy. Families crowded into single rooms. Unmarried slaves often lived in barracks.

Food: Basic rations—manioc flour, beans, occasional dried meat or fish. Sometimes provision plots where slaves could grow vegetables on Sundays. Malnutrition was common.

Work: 12-16 hours per day during harvest, 10-12 hours otherwise. Work was physically exhausting—cutting cane or harvesting coffee in tropical heat, processing crops, clearing land.

Violence: Whipping remained standard punishment. Other tortures included stocks, iron collars, solitary confinement. Sexual violence against women and girls was endemic.

Health: No medical care. Infant mortality extremely high (perhaps 30-40% of children died before age 5). Life expectancy for enslaved adults perhaps 30-40 years. Injuries from work (machete cuts, crushing accidents) often led to infection and death.

Family: Families were formed but unstable—subject to sale, internal trade, master's whim. Children could be sold away from parents. Spouses separated.

Religion: African religions practiced secretly. Catholic baptism and marriage required but often nominal. Funerals sometimes allowed African rites mixed with Catholic ceremony.

What changed 1822-1888: Almost nothing. Coffee replaced sugar as dominant crop in some regions. Some slaves moved from Northeast to Southeast through internal trade. But conditions, violence, and oppression remained constant.

Freed People's Experience (1888-1930)

First generation (1888-1910):

The approximately 700,000 people freed in 1888 faced immediate survival crises:

Rural freed people (majority):

Most stayed on or near plantations where they had been enslaved:

Material conditions:

- Housing: Old senzalas or minimal shacks
- Income: 500-800 réis per day as wage laborers (barely sufficient for food)
- Food: Similar to slavery—manioc, beans, minimal protein
- Health: No better than slavery—still no medical care, high infant mortality
- Education: No schools, children worked alongside parents

Social conditions:

- Violence continued: Planters' jagunços beat or killed workers who challenged authority
- Mobility limited: Theoretically free to leave but no alternatives
- Debt bondage: Many fell into debt with plantation stores, effectively trapped
- Racial discrimination: Treated as inferior, socially segregated from whites

Political exclusion:

- Couldn't vote (illiterate)
- Couldn't hold office

- No legal recourse against planter abuse (courts controlled by elites)

Urban migrants:

Those who moved to cities faced different but equally difficult conditions:

Material conditions:

- Housing: Favelas, cortiços, illegal squatter settlements
- Income: Irregular, informal economy, 300-600 réis per day when employed
- Food: Minimal, purchased (more expensive than rural)
- Health: Worse than rural—crowding, poor sanitation, epidemic diseases

Social conditions:

- Police harassment constant
- Discrimination in employment (immigrants preferred)
- Racial segregation in housing and public spaces
- Violence from police and vigilantes

Second generation (born 1888-1910):

Children born to freed people had somewhat better literacy (perhaps 5-10% by 1920) due to limited charity schools and some public education. But:

Material conditions: Similar poverty—most worked as rural laborers, domestic servants, or informal sector

Social mobility: Extremely limited. Most remained in same class as parents. Few escaped poverty.

Political rights: Most still couldn't vote (literacy requirement plus informal barriers)

Indigenous Peoples' Experience (1822-1930)

Indigenous peoples continued to face genocide and dispossession:

Population decline:

Estimates suggest indigenous population in regions under Brazilian control declined from perhaps 300,000-400,000 (1822) to 200,000-300,000 (1930).

Causes of decline:

- Disease: Continued epidemics as frontier expanded
- Violence: Military expeditions, settler attacks, dispossession-caused starvation
- Cultural destruction: Mission system, forced assimilation

- Land seizure: Constant encroachment pushing people into smaller territories

Regional patterns:

Amazon: Rubber boom (1870s-1910) brought catastrophic violence. Rubber tappers enslaved indigenous people, killed resisters, destroyed communities. Populations collapsed.

Central Brazil: Expansion of cattle ranching and coffee planting pushed indigenous groups further inland. Many groups lost all territory.

South: German and Italian colonization in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina resulted in extermination or extreme marginalization of Kaingang and Guaraní peoples.

SPI (Indian Protection Service, 1910):

The federal government created SPI (Serviço de Proteção aos Índios) in 1910 ostensibly to protect indigenous peoples. But SPI actually facilitated land seizure by:

- Creating reservations (tiny compared to original territories)
- "Civilizing" programs destroying cultures
- Opening indigenous lands to settlers after "pacification"

By 1930: Indigenous peoples retained autonomous control only in remote Amazon and Central Brazil regions. Everywhere else, they had been killed, displaced, or marginalized.

Rural Poor (Non-Enslaved) Experience

Free poor people—small farmers, sharecroppers, ranch workers, migrants—remained impoverished throughout 1822-1930:

Material conditions:

Small farmers:

- Land: Tiny plots (1-10 hectares) often on poor soil
- Production: Subsistence agriculture plus small surplus for sale
- Income: Perhaps 200-500 mil-réis per year
- Housing: Minimal mud or wood shacks
- Diet: Monotonous—manioc, beans, occasional meat
- Health: No medical care, high child mortality

Sharecroppers:

- Land: Worked others' land for share of crop (usually 50% or less)
- Debt: Usually in debt to landowner for tools, seeds, credit
- Income: Often ended year with no cash after debt payments

- Housing: Provided by landowner, minimal
- Mobility: Theoretically free but debt trapped many

Ranch workers:

- Work: Herding cattle, repairing fences, various ranch tasks
- Pay: Minimal wages plus housing and food
- Conditions: Isolated, subject to ranch owner's authority
- Violence: Could be beaten or killed by owner's men with no legal recourse

Social conditions:

- Illiteracy: 80-90%+ of rural poor illiterate in 1930
- Political exclusion: Couldn't vote (literacy requirement)
- Violence exposure: Subject to coronéis' violence, no legal protection
- Social immobility: Children inherited parents' poverty

The Statistics of Continuity (1890 vs. 1920)

Comparing data from 1890 (shortly after abolition) and 1920 (end of Old Republic) reveals continuity of extraction:

Land ownership:

1890: Top 3,000-4,000 families owned ~85-90% of agricultural land

1920: Top 5,000-8,000 families owned ~85-90% of agricultural land

Concentration remained constant. New coffee planters were often relatives of old sugar senhores or immigrants who accumulated capital and bought land—joining the elite rather than challenging it.

Literacy rates:

1890: ~15% national literacy

1920: ~25% national literacy

Improvement, but still excluded 75% of population from voting and most economic opportunities.

Urban-rural split:

1890: ~10% urban, ~90% rural

1920: ~15% urban, ~85% rural

Slight urbanization, but Brazil remained overwhelmingly rural and agricultural.

Infant mortality:

1890: Estimated 150-200 deaths per 1,000 live births

1920: Estimated 140-180 deaths per 1,000 live births

Minimal improvement. Compare to European rates of 80-100 per 1,000 by 1920.

Life expectancy:

1890: Approximately 32-35 years

1920: Approximately 35-38 years

Slight improvement, but still shockingly low. European life expectancy was 50-55 years by 1920.

Racial wealth gap (estimates):

1920:

- White families: Average wealth ~5,000-8,000 mil-réis
- Mulatto families: Average wealth ~1,000-2,000 mil-réis
- Black families: Average wealth ~400-800 mil-réis

5-10x wealth gap between white and Black families persisted from slavery through 1920 (and beyond).

V. The Structures That Persisted (1822-1930)

Land Ownership Structure

1822: ~2,000-3,000 families controlled 90-95% of productive land

1930: ~8,000-12,000 families controlled 85-90% of productive land

The number of elite families increased as Brazil grew, but concentration remained extreme. New wealth (coffee, industry, commerce) tended to purchase land and join the landed elite rather than challenge it.

Mechanisms of persistence:

Legal protection: Property rights continuously protected. No land reform, no redistribution, no limits on concentration.

Inheritance: Land passed through families. Strategic marriages kept estates consolidated.

Expansion: Elites claimed "new" land on frontiers (often indigenous territories) through legal fictions and violence.

Purchase: Coffee wealth was invested in more land. The rich got richer and bought more.

Racial Hierarchy Structure

Top tier (1-2% of population in 1930): White elite families—owned land, businesses, held political power

Upper-middle (8-10%): White professionals, small business owners, government officials

Middle (15-20%): Mulatto workers, small farmers, artisans—better off than Black population but still excluded from top

Lower (20-25%): Poor whites, recent immigrants—often poor but still privileged over Blacks

Bottom (40-50%): Black population—freed slaves' descendants, rural workers, urban poor, most impoverished and discriminated against

Excluded (2-4%): Indigenous peoples

This hierarchy was maintained through:

- Wealth concentration (whites owned capital)
- Education access (whites literate, Blacks mostly not)
- Employment discrimination (whites preferred for better jobs)
- Social segregation (residential, social clubs, marriage patterns)
- Violence (police targeted Black populations, coronéis' violence enforced hierarchy)

Violence Monopoly Structure

Federal military: Small regular army (~30,000-40,000 by 1930)

State militaries: States maintained forces (particularly São Paulo and Minas Gerais)—São Paulo had ~15,000-20,000 by 1920s

Police: State police forces grew—São Paulo had ~10,000 police by 1920s. Used primarily to control urban poor and rural workers.

Coronéis' private militias: Thousands of coronéis each maintained armed retainers—collectively 50,000-100,000 armed men across Brazil

Workers and poor: Disarmed and criminalized. Owning weapons was restricted. Poor people caught with weapons faced harsh punishment.

This monopoly enabled:

- Suppression of strikes (police and military broke labor organizing)
- Electoral control (coronéis' jagunços enforced voting compliance)

- Land maintenance (violence expelled squatters, suppressed land invasions)
- Racial hierarchy (police violence kept Black populations subordinated)

Education and Literacy Structure

1930 literacy rates by class/race:

White elite children: ~80-90% literate

White middle-class children: ~50-60% literate

Mulatto children: ~20-30% literate

Black children: ~5-10% literate

Indigenous children: ~1-2% literate

Overall literacy: ~25% (vs. 15% in 1890)

Why low literacy persisted:

No public education mandate: Constitution didn't require universal education. States could (but weren't required to) provide schools.

Underfunding: Education received 2-5% of government budgets—far too little for universal coverage.

Rural absence: Most rural areas had no schools at all. Children worked in fields instead of attending non-existent schools.

Urban inadequacy: Even cities had insufficient schools for working-class children.

Elite preference: Elite sent children to private schools or hired tutors. They had no interest in funding public education that would benefit poor.

Literacy requirement for voting: Maintaining low literacy served elite interests—kept majority politically excluded.

Economic Structure

Export agriculture dominated:

1890 exports:

- Coffee: 55-60%
- Sugar: 10-15%
- Cotton: 5-10%
- Rubber: 15-20%
- Other: 5-10%

1930 exports:

- Coffee: 70-75%
- Sugar: 3-5%
- Cotton: 3-5%
- Rubber: 2-3% (Amazon rubber boom collapsed 1910s)
- Other: 15-20%

Coffee's dominance increased. Economic diversification was minimal.

Import dependence:

Brazil imported manufactured goods—machinery, cloth, tools, chemicals, luxury items. Imported approximately 80-90% of manufactured goods consumed.

Industrial development minimal:

By 1930, industry (mostly textiles and food processing) represented ~15-20% of GDP. Brazil remained primarily agricultural.

Capital concentration:

Wealth accumulated in elite hands was invested in:

- More land
- Urban real estate
- Government bonds
- Foreign investments

It was NOT invested in:

- Industrial development (some exceptions)
- Infrastructure (minimal)
- Public services (education, health)
- Redistribution (none)

Elite Network Structure

The elite families of 1930 were often descendants or business partners of 1822 elite:

Intermarriage: Coffee fazendeiros married into old sugar families. Industrial wealth married landed wealth. Elite remained interconnected.

Political control: Elite families dominated Senate, Chamber of Deputies, state governments, federal bureaucracy.

Business networks: Coffee exporters, import merchants, bankers, and planters formed interlocking business relationships.

Social clubs: Exclusive clubs in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo where elite socialized and coordinated.

Shared ideology: Elite believed in racial hierarchy, property rights, export agriculture, limited government (except when government benefited them), and their natural right to rule.

Coordinated responses to threats: When labor organized or land invasions occurred, elite coordinated repression through government violence.

Conclusion: Independence Without Liberation, Abolition Without Land

The 108 years from 1822 to 1930 demonstrated a clear pattern: Political changes (independence, abolition, republicanism) that occur without structural transformation maintain extraction under new management.

What changed 1822-1930:

Political regime: Monarchy → Republic

Elite identity: Portuguese senhores → Brazilian planters → Coffee oligarchs

Dominant crop: Sugar → Coffee

Labor system: Slavery → "Free" wage labor

Immigration: 4-5 million Europeans arrived

What didn't change:

Land ownership: Same families (or their associates) controlled land

Wealth concentration: Top 1-2% controlled 60-70% of wealth

Racial hierarchy: Whites at top, Blacks at bottom, now with Europeans added at middle

Violence monopoly: Elite controlled military, police, private militias

Education access: 75% illiterate in 1930, concentration among poor and Black

Political power: Elite dominated government through voting restrictions and coronelismo

Economic model: Export agriculture, import manufactures

The human impact:

For the average Brazilian in 1930 compared to 1822:

If you were Black: Life was marginally better (legal freedom vs. slavery) but materially similar (landless, poor, illiterate, politically excluded, subject to violence)

If you were indigenous: Life was worse (further displacement, continued genocide, no territory)

If you were poor free person: Life was somewhat better (more economic opportunities in cities, some education access) but still impoverished and politically excluded

If you were elite: Life was much better (more wealth, continued political control, coffee boom, retained all advantages)

The mechanism:

Elite-led independence (1822) preserved extraction because elites designed the new state to protect their interests. They kept land, kept slavery (until 1888), restricted voting, and maintained violence monopoly.

Abolition without land (1888) provided legal freedom but maintained economic subordination. Freed people had no assets, no education, no political power. They remained dependent on elite employment.

Republican democracy without structural change (1889-1930) created elections and institutions but didn't break elite power. Literacy requirements excluded majority. Coronelismo controlled rural voting. Elite networks dominated government.

The comparison that matters:

Imagine if 1822 independence had included:

- Land redistribution
- Universal suffrage
- Education mandate
- Labor rights

Or if 1888 abolition had included:

- Land grants to freed people
- Education programs
- Credit access
- Political rights

Or if 1889 republic had included:

- Universal suffrage (regardless of literacy)
- Land reform
- Strong labor rights
- Public education mandate

Any of these would have broken the extraction pattern. None occurred because elites controlled all three transitions and designed them to preserve their power.

Part 3 will examine 1930-1985: The Vargas era bringing industrialization and labor rights (for urban workers only, excluding rural poor). Import-substitution industrialization creating São Paulo industrial base (but not breaking plantation power). The 1964 military coup killing land reform attempts. The military dictatorship's modernization of agribusiness (making extraction more efficient, not ending it). And the question: Did industrialization transform Brazil or just add new extraction sectors to old ones?

The evidence will show: Industrialization without land reform and education equity creates industrial extraction alongside agricultural extraction. The structures established 1500-1822 and maintained 1822-1930 would persist through industrialization 1930-1985 because they were never broken.

End of Part 2

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Statistical Note:

Economic and demographic data for 1822-1930 Brazil comes from fragmentary records. The 1872 and 1890 censuses provide some baseline data, but rural areas were undercounted and freed people's conditions were poorly documented. Estimates in this study use middle-range scholarly consensus where possible and indicate uncertainty with ranges.

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Part: 2 of 4

Brazil: From Plantation Colony to Agribusiness Republic

Part 3 of 4: Industrialization Without Transformation (1930-1985)

Modernizing Extraction, Preserving Hierarchy

Introduction: The Industrial Illusion

On October 24, 1930, Getúlio Vargas took power in a coup that ended the Old Republic and promised to transform Brazil. Over the next 54 years (1930-1985), Brazil would experience dramatic changes: Industrialization created São Paulo as a manufacturing powerhouse. Urban population surged from 15% (1930) to 67% (1985). GDP per capita increased five-fold. Labor laws gave urban workers rights and protections. Infrastructure expanded massively—roads, dams, ports, airports.

By 1985, Brazil was the world's eighth-largest economy. It produced automobiles, aircraft, steel, chemicals, electronics. It had a sophisticated financial sector, stock markets, and modern cities with skyscrapers and subway systems. This was no longer the agricultural backwater of 1930.

Yet the fundamental extraction patterns established 1500-1822 and maintained 1822-1930 persisted. Land remained concentrated—by 1985, 1% of properties controlled 45% of agricultural land. Racial wealth gaps remained enormous—white families averaged 3-4 times the wealth of Black families. Violence monopoly remained with military and police who killed thousands of civilians during 1964-1985 dictatorship. Education gaps persisted—elite children attended universities while poor children dropped out of primary school. Rural poor remained landless, impoverished, and politically excluded.

How did this happen? How did Brazil industrialize dramatically while maintaining plantation-era extraction patterns?

This part examines the answer: **Industrialization without structural transformation adds new extraction sectors to old ones rather than replacing them.** When industrialization occurs without land reform, without education equity, without democratization of violence, and without elite restraint, it creates urban-industrial extraction alongside rural-agricultural extraction. Both coexist, both persist.

The period divides into three phases: Vargas era (1930-1945) bringing industrialization and urban labor rights but excluding rural workers; Democratic interlude (1945-1964) when land

reform was proposed but blocked; and Military dictatorship (1964-1985) when elites used violence to prevent redistribution and modernized agribusiness into an efficient export machine.

What happened to average Brazilians reveals the pattern: Urban industrial workers gained rights and modest prosperity (creating a new middle class). But rural workers remained trapped in poverty. Indigenous peoples faced accelerated genocide as Amazon "development" seized their lands. The racial hierarchy persisted with industrialization adding layers rather than breaking it.

By 1985, Brazil had two economies: A modern industrial-service economy concentrated in São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro-Minas Gerais triangle, and a traditional agricultural-extraction economy in vast interior and Northeast. But both were controlled by interconnected elites. The plantation senhores of 1822 had become the agribusiness magnates and industrial tycoons of 1985—often literally the same families.

I. The Vargas Era: Industrialization and Urban Labor Rights (1930-1945)

The 1930 Revolution and Vargas's Rise

Getúlio Vargas came to power on October 24, 1930, after a brief civil conflict that overthrew the Old Republic. The coalition that brought him to power included:

Military officers: Particularly junior officers (tenentes) who had rebelled against Old Republic in 1920s, wanting modernization and meritocracy

Regional elites: Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais political machines excluded from café com leite power-sharing

Urban middle class: Professionals, merchants, industrialists wanting economic diversification and government support for industry

Some urban workers: Hoping for labor rights and better conditions

Who wasn't included: Rural workers (still 85% of population), freed people and their descendants, landless poor, indigenous peoples—the majority had no voice.

What Vargas promised:

Modernization: Industrial development, infrastructure, economic diversification beyond coffee

National unity: Ending regional conflicts, strengthening federal power

Social justice: Labor rights, welfare programs, protections for workers

Order: Strong government maintaining stability

What Vargas didn't promise: Land reform, wealth redistribution, challenging elite power, racial equality

The critical pattern: Vargas represented accommodation with, not confrontation of, landed elite. He would modernize Brazil by adding industry, not by transforming agriculture.

Estado Novo: The New State (1937-1945)

After ruling constitutionally 1930-1937, Vargas launched a coup against his own government on November 10, 1937, establishing the Estado Novo (New State)—an authoritarian regime inspired by European fascism:

Political structure:

No elections: Congress dissolved, political parties banned, Vargas ruled by decree

Censorship: Press controlled, opposition suppressed, propaganda promoted regime

Police state: Political police (DPS/DOPS) arrested, tortured, and killed opponents

Nationalism: "Brazil for Brazilians" rhetoric, xenophobic policies targeting immigrant communities

Corporatism: Society organized into state-controlled corporate bodies representing different sectors—but controlled from above, not democratically

Why rural workers accepted dictatorship:

The coronéis who had controlled rural Brazil under Old Republic were accommodated rather than eliminated. Vargas made a deal:

Coronéis kept local power: Their violence monopoly, land ownership, and political control over rural workers continued

Federal government gained: Tax revenue, political stability, military recruitment, food supplies for cities

Result: Rural Brazil remained under coronel rule. The Estado Novo's modernization was urban, not rural.

Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI)

Vargas pursued deliberate industrialization through import-substitution—producing domestically what Brazil had previously imported:

The strategy:

Tariff protection: High tariffs on manufactured imports forced Brazilians to buy domestic products

State investment: Government invested in basic industries—steel, chemicals, energy

Credit subsidies: State banks provided cheap credit to industrialists

Infrastructure: Government built roads, ports, power plants enabling industrial production

National companies: State created companies in strategic sectors—Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (steel, 1941), Petrobras (oil, 1953), Eletrobras (electricity)

Results by 1945:

Manufacturing growth: Industry grew from ~15% of GDP (1930) to ~25% of GDP (1945)

São Paulo dominance: São Paulo became industrial center—textiles, food processing, light manufacturing, metal working

Employment: Industrial employment increased from ~500,000 (1930) to ~1.5 million (1945)

Imports declined: Manufactured imports fell from 80% of consumption (1930) to 50% (1945)

Who benefited:

Industrialists: Protected from foreign competition, they accumulated wealth and built factories

Urban workers: Industrial jobs paid better than agricultural labor—creating path to modest prosperity for some

State: Tax revenues increased as economy grew

Middle class: Professional, technical, and managerial jobs multiplied

Who didn't benefit:

Rural workers: Still trapped on plantations, earning minimal wages, no labor rights

Small farmers: Couldn't compete with subsidized large landowners

Indigenous peoples: "Development" meant roads and settlers invading their territories

The CLT: Labor Laws for Urban Workers Only

Vargas's signature achievement was the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (CLT)—Labor Law Consolidation, promulgated May 1, 1943:

What CLT provided (for urban workers):

Eight-hour workday: Maximum 44 hours per week

Minimum wage: Set by government, adjusted periodically

Paid vacation: Annual paid vacation (initially 15 days, later expanded)

Overtime pay: Extra pay for work beyond regular hours

Job security: Restrictions on arbitrary firing

Maternity leave: Paid leave for pregnant workers

Workplace safety: Standards for safe working conditions

Labor courts: Special courts to adjudicate employer-worker disputes

Social security: Retirement pensions, disability insurance, healthcare access

Unions: State-sponsored unions representing workers (but controlled by government)

This was revolutionary for urban workers. Factory workers, office employees, shop workers gained rights unprecedented in Brazilian history. The CLT created a formal labor sector with protections, benefits, and legal recourse.

But the critical exclusion:

Article 7 of CLT: "Rural workers are excluded from this law."

Rural workers received: Zero protections, zero minimum wage, zero overtime, zero vacation, zero retirement, zero healthcare, zero labor courts, zero unions

Why exclude rural workers?

Political calculation: Vargas needed to maintain alliance with landed elite (fazendeiros). Rural workers were 85% of workforce in 1940. Giving them labor rights would have:

- Increased agricultural labor costs dramatically
- Empowered workers to challenge fazendeiro authority
- Required enforcement mechanisms in vast countryside
- Threatened the entire plantation system

Vargas chose urban workers over rural workers. This created a two-tier labor system:

Tier 1 (urban, formal sector): Protected by CLT, could unionize (within limits), had labor courts, received benefits

Tier 2 (rural, informal urban): No protections, no minimum wage, subject to employer's whim, police repression if they organized

By 1945:

Urban formal workers: ~2 million, ~8% of workforce—protected

Rural workers: ~18 million, ~72% of workforce—unprotected

Urban informal workers: ~5 million, ~20% of workforce—unprotected

The majority remained excluded from Vargas's "social justice."

What Didn't Change Under Vargas

Despite industrialization and labor rights, fundamental structures persisted:

Land ownership:

1930: Top 1% of properties controlled ~48% of agricultural land

1945: Top 1% of properties controlled ~50% of agricultural land

No land reform. The concentration increased slightly as large fazendeiros bought out smaller farmers during 1930s economic crisis.

Violence monopoly:

Military: Grew from 30,000 (1930) to 100,000 (1945)—professionalized and modernized

State police: Expanded dramatically, particularly in São Paulo

Coronéis' militias: Continued in rural areas—Vargas left them intact

Political police: Created to suppress opposition—tortured and killed labor activists, communists, suspected dissidents

Education:

1940 census literacy: 43% (up from 25% in 1920)—significant improvement but still excluded majority

Rural education: Minimal. Most rural areas still had no schools.

University access: Restricted to elite—perhaps 20,000-30,000 university students in country of 41 million

Quality gap: Elite private schools versus poor public schools—gap widening not narrowing

Racial wealth gap:

1940 estimates:

- White families: Average annual income ~2,000-3,000 mil-réis
- Mulatto families: Average annual income ~800-1,200 mil-réis
- Black families: Average annual income ~500-800 mil-réis

3-6x income gap persisted despite industrialization.

Political power:

Vargas ruled by decree 1937-1945. No elections meant no popular participation. Elite—now including industrialists alongside landowners—controlled government through access to Vargas and his ministers.

II. Democratic Interlude: The Opportunity That Failed (1945-1964)

Redemocratization (1945-1946)

World War II's end (Brazil fought with Allies) made continuing dictatorship untenable. Military officers who had fought fascism in Italy couldn't justify supporting dictatorship at home. In October 1945, military forced Vargas to resign and called elections.

1946 Constitution:

Brazil's new democratic constitution (September 1946) restored:

Elections: President, congress, governors, mayors all elected

Freedom of speech and press: Censorship ended

Political parties: Multiple parties allowed—including Communist Party (briefly)

Labor rights: CLT maintained for urban workers

Federal system: States retained autonomy

But still restricted:

Voting limited: Illiterates couldn't vote (still 57% of population in 1950)

No land reform mandate: Property rights protected

Military retained power: Could intervene in politics "to maintain order"

The Land Question Emerges

During 1950s-early 1960s, land reform became central political issue:

The problem intensifies:

Population growth: Brazil's population grew from 41 million (1940) to 70 million (1960) to 80 million (1964)—food demand increased

Urbanization: Urban population reached 45% by 1960—cities needed food supplies

Land concentration: By 1950, census showed:

- Properties <10 hectares (small farmers): 34% of farms, controlled 1.3% of land
- Properties >1,000 hectares (large estates): 1.6% of farms, controlled 50% of land
- Largest 1%: Controlled 45-50% of all agricultural land

Rural poverty: Millions of rural workers remained landless, working as sharecroppers, day laborers, or squatters on marginal land

Peasant organizing:

Peasant Leagues (Ligas Camponesas): Founded 1955 in Pernambuco by Francisco Julião, spread rapidly through Northeast. Organized rural workers demanding:

- Land reform
- Labor rights extended to rural workers
- End to feudal conditions (sharecropping, debt bondage)
- Schools and healthcare in countryside

By early 1960s, Peasant Leagues had hundreds of thousands of members across Northeast. They terrified landowners.

Communist Party: Also organized rural workers, though PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) was banned and operated clandestinely.

Catholic Church: Some progressive priests and Catholic Action groups supported rural workers, creating competition with communists for organizing.

João Goulart and the Reform Agenda (1961-1964)

João "Jango" Goulart became president in 1961 (after serving as Vargas's labor minister and vice president). He was a wealthy landowner himself—but he proposed reforms that threatened elite interests:

The Basic Reforms (Reformas de Base):

Land reform: Expropriate unproductive large estates and redistribute to landless families

Extension of labor rights: Apply CLT to rural workers

Rent control: Limit urban rent increases

Tax reform: Progressive taxation on wealth and income

Educational reform: Massive expansion of public education

Electoral reform: Allow illiterates to vote (would enfranchise 60 million people)

Why Goulart proposed these:

Political calculation: He needed support from workers and peasants to counter conservative opposition

Economic argument: Land reform would increase agricultural productivity and create domestic market

Social justice: Genuine belief that inequality was unjust

International context: Alliance for Progress (US program) encouraged reform to prevent communist revolution

Elite reaction:

The landed elite, industrialists, military officers, and urban middle class reacted with panic:

Land reform meant: Seizure of their property (landowners)

Rural labor rights meant: Loss of cheap labor (fazendeiros)

Electoral reform meant: Political power for poor majority (elite would lose control)

Progressive taxation meant: Wealth redistribution (rich would pay)

The elite saw Goulart's reforms as existential threat. They organized to prevent them.

The mobilization against reforms:

IPES (Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais): Business organization funded massive propaganda campaign portraying reforms as communist takeover

Military conspiracy: Officers planned coup to prevent reforms

US support: CIA provided funding and coordination for anti-Goulart forces

Media campaign: Newspapers and radio (owned by elite families) attacked reforms daily

Middle-class mobilization: "March of the Family with God for Liberty" (March 19, 1964) brought hundreds of thousands to São Paulo streets protesting "communist threat"

The 1964 Coup: Killing Reform

On March 31, 1964, Brazilian military overthrew Goulart in a coup coordinated with business elite and supported by United States:

The justification:

Official story: Preventing communist takeover, restoring order, protecting democracy

Actual reason: Preventing land reform, blocking rural labor rights, stopping electoral expansion, maintaining elite power

Immediate actions:

April 1964: Military arrested thousands—labor leaders, peasant organizers, left-wing politicians, student activists, intellectuals

Torture: Political prisoners systematically tortured to extract information and intimidate opposition

Purges: Universities, unions, government bureaucracy purged of suspected leftists

Media censorship: Press brought under control

Congress purged: Opposition politicians stripped of political rights

Elections canceled: Direct elections for president suspended (wouldn't resume until 1989)

Land reform dies:

The military regime's first priority was ending land reform agitation:

Peasant Leagues destroyed: Leaders arrested or killed, organizations disbanded

Rural union organizers: Arrested, tortured, murdered (exact numbers unknown—hundreds certainly, possibly thousands)

Landed elite protected: No expropriation, no redistribution, property rights absolute

Violence in countryside: Military and landowner militias killed peasant activists with impunity

The 1964 coup specifically targeted those threatening the land ownership system established in 1500s. It was a defense of extraction against popular mobilization for transformation.

III. Military Dictatorship: Modernizing Extraction (1964-1985)

The Dictatorship's Structure

Military ruled Brazil 1964-1985 through five successive generals as presidents:

Castelo Branco (1964-1967): Established dictatorship, purged opposition

Costa e Silva (1967-1969): Hardened repression

Médici (1969-1974): Height of repression and torture

Geisel (1974-1979): Began gradual "opening" (abertura)

Figueiredo (1979-1985): Continued abertura, negotiated transition

Institutional Acts: Military ruled through Institutional Acts—decrees with force of law:

AI-1 (April 1964): Gave president power to cancel mandates, suspend rights

AI-2 (October 1965): Abolished political parties, expanded president's power

AI-5 (December 1968): Most repressive—closed Congress, suspended habeas corpus, gave president dictatorial powers

Political system:

Two-party system: ARENA (government party) and MDB (controlled opposition)

Congress: Existed but had no real power—could debate but not block government

Elections: Legislative elections allowed (but government manipulated results), no direct presidential elections

Censorship: Total control of media—newspapers submitted articles to censors before publication

Repression and Torture

The military dictatorship systematically used violence against opposition:

Who was targeted:

Guerrillas: Small armed resistance groups (never more than few hundred fighters) in cities and Amazon

Labor organizers: Union activists, strike leaders

Student activists: University students protesting dictatorship

Peasant organizers: Rural workers demanding land

Intellectuals: Professors, artists, journalists critical of regime

Methods:

Arbitrary arrest: Detention without warrant or charges

Torture: Systematic use of electric shock (pau de arara), drowning simulation, beatings, sexual violence, psychological torture

Disappearance: Perhaps 400-500 people "disappeared"—arrested and never seen again, presumably killed

Execution: Summary execution of guerrillas and some political prisoners

Exile: Thousands forced into exile—including intellectuals, politicians, artists

Scale:

Arrested/detained: Tens of thousands over 21 years

Tortured: Thousands documented cases, likely many more unreported

Killed/disappeared: Approximately 400-500 confirmed (probably more)

Exiled: Approximately 10,000 forced to leave Brazil

Compared to other South American dictatorships: Brazilian military killed fewer people than Argentine junta (30,000 disappeared) or Chilean dictatorship (3,000+ killed). But the repression was still extensive and created climate of terror.

Who implemented torture:

Military: Army, Navy, Air Force intelligence units all tortured

Police: State police (particularly São Paulo) operated torture centers

DOI-CODI: Department of Internal Operations-Center for Internal Defense Operations—specialized repression/torture apparatus

Training: US provided training in "counter-insurgency" including interrogation techniques—School of the Americas in Panama trained Brazilian officers

The Economic Miracle (1968-1973)

Despite political repression, the economy grew dramatically 1968-1973—called the "Brazilian Miracle":

Growth rates:

1968: 9.8% GDP growth

1969: 9.5%

1970: 10.4%

1971: 11.3%

1972: 11.9%

1973: 13.9%

Average 10-11% annual growth—spectacular by any measure.

Drivers of growth:

Foreign investment: Multinational corporations invested heavily—Ford, Volkswagen, General Motors built auto plants

State investment: Government invested in infrastructure—roads, dams, telecommunications

Credit expansion: Easy credit fueled consumer spending

Export growth: Agricultural and manufactured exports increased

Construction boom: Cities expanded rapidly—São Paulo's population grew from 3.8 million (1960) to 8.5 million (1980)

Who benefited:

Urban middle class: White-collar workers, professionals, managers saw incomes rise 50-100% during miracle years

Industrial workers: Formal sector workers benefited from growth (though strikes forbidden, wages were compressed)

Industrialists: Corporate profits soared

Foreign corporations: Multinationals made enormous profits

Who didn't benefit:

Rural workers: Agricultural wages stayed flat or declined in real terms

Favela residents: Urban poor in slums saw minimal benefit

Northeastern poor: Region bypassed by miracle (growth concentrated in Southeast)

Small farmers: Squeezed by large agribusiness expansion

Inequality increased:

1960: Richest 10% earned 40% of national income, poorest 50% earned 17%

1970: Richest 10% earned 47% of national income, poorest 50% earned 15%

1976: Richest 10% earned 51% of national income, poorest 50% earned 12%

The miracle enriched those already well-off while bypassing the poor. Growth without redistribution increased inequality.

The Agribusiness Revolution

The military regime transformed Brazilian agriculture through deliberate modernization—but without land reform:

The policy framework:

Credit subsidies: Massive subsidized credit for large farmers to purchase:

- Tractors and machinery
- Chemical fertilizers
- Pesticides and herbicides
- Improved seeds
- Irrigation systems

Infrastructure: Government built roads into interior (Transamazon Highway, BR-163, etc.), enabling access to new lands

Research: EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, 1973) developed technologies for tropical agriculture

Price supports: Government guaranteed minimum prices for key crops

Export promotion: State agencies promoted Brazilian agricultural exports

Who received subsidies:

Large landowners: 80-90% of agricultural credit went to largest 10% of farms

Small farmers: Received minimal credit, couldn't afford modernization

Result: Large farms mechanized and became highly productive. Small farms remained subsistence-level.

Crops promoted:

Soybeans: Production exploded—became major export (to Europe for animal feed, to Asia for food)

Beef: Cattle ranching expanded massively in Amazon and Central-West

Sugarcane: Expanded for ethanol production (after 1973 oil crisis)

Coffee: Remained important though declining share of exports

Corn, wheat, cotton: All expanded

Environmental destruction:

Amazon deforestation: Government encouraged settlement and ranching in Amazon:

- 1970: 1-2% of Amazon deforested
- 1985: 8-10% of Amazon deforested

Cerrado conversion: Central Brazil's savanna (cerrado) converted to soybean fields—millions of hectares

Atlantic Forest: Remaining Atlantic coastal forest cleared for pasture and agriculture

Displacement:

Indigenous peoples: Amazon "development" seized indigenous territories:

- Roads cut through indigenous lands
- Ranchers invaded and cleared land
- Government "pacification" programs destroyed communities
- Population decline through disease and violence

Small farmers: Pushed off land by large landowners:

- Land concentration increased as large farmers bought out small farmers
- Mechanization reduced labor demand
- Displaced farmers migrated to cities or Amazon frontier

The numbers:

1960 agricultural land use: ~250 million hectares

1985 agricultural land use: ~375 million hectares (50% increase)

1960 tractors: ~60,000

1985 tractors: ~650,000 (10x increase)

1960 fertilizer use: ~300,000 tons

1985 fertilizer use: ~6 million tons (20x increase)

1960 land concentration: 1% of properties controlled 45% of land

1985 land concentration: 1% of properties controlled 45% of land (unchanged despite growth)

The pattern: Agriculture modernized—became more productive, more export-oriented, more technologically advanced. But land remained concentrated. Rural workers remained poor. Indigenous peoples lost territory. Environmental destruction accelerated.

This was **modernization of extraction, not transformation of it.**

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST)

In response to continued land concentration and rural poverty, rural workers organized the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST—Landless Workers' Movement) in 1984:

Formation: Founded by rural workers, progressive Catholic Church activists, and left-wing organizers in southern Brazil

Strategy:

- Occupy "unproductive" large estates
- Establish encampments
- Demand expropriation and redistribution
- Create schools, cooperatives, healthcare in settlements

Ideology: Land should belong to those who work it, not absentee owners

Scale: By 1985, MST had organized perhaps 20,000-30,000 families in land occupations

Response: Landowners and military violently repressed—police evictions, shootings, arrests. But MST survived and would grow dramatically after 1985.

MST's emergence in dictatorship's final year demonstrated that rural land conflict—the same conflict that led to 1964 coup—hadn't been resolved, just violently suppressed.

IV. What Happened to Average People (1930-1985)

Urban Industrial Workers: The Success Story

For urban formal-sector workers, 1930-1985 brought real gains:

1940 urban industrial worker:

- Income: ~1,500 mil-réis/year
- Housing: Tenement or small rental
- Education: Primary school if lucky
- Healthcare: Minimal
- Retirement: None
- Job security: None

1985 urban industrial worker:

- Income: ~3-5x minimum wage (~15,000-25,000 cruzeiros/month in 1985, ~\$150-250 USD)
- Housing: Owned small house or apartment (often through government housing programs)
- Education: Children attended secondary school
- Healthcare: Access through social security system
- Retirement: Pension guaranteed
- Job security: Protected by CLT

The gains were real: Urban workers' material conditions improved dramatically. A working-class family could own a home, buy appliances, educate children, plan for retirement. This created Brazil's "new middle class."

But limited scope: Only ~25-30% of workforce in formal sector by 1985. Informal workers and rural workers remained excluded.

Rural Workers: Continuity of Extraction

For rural workers, conditions barely improved:

1940 rural worker:

- Income: ~500 mil-réis/year
- Housing: Shack on landowner's property or squatter settlement
- Education: None
- Healthcare: None
- Retirement: None
- Job security: None
- Labor rights: None

1985 rural worker:

- Income: ~1-2x minimum wage (~5,000-10,000 cruzeiros/month, ~\$50-100 USD)
- Housing: Shack on landowner's property or squatter settlement
- Education: Perhaps primary school for children in some areas
- Healthcare: Minimal
- Retirement: None (not covered by social security)
- Job security: None
- Labor rights: Minimal (CLT extended to rural workers in 1963, but rarely enforced)

Real wages stagnant: After accounting for inflation, rural workers earned little more in 1985 than 1940.

Technology replacement: Mechanization reduced labor demand. Where 100 workers were needed in 1960, perhaps 20-30 were needed in 1985 with tractors and machinery.

Landlessness increased: More rural workers were landless in 1985 than 1940 despite population growth and agricultural expansion.

Indigenous Peoples: Accelerated Genocide

For indigenous peoples, 1930-1985 was catastrophic:

Population:

- 1930: ~200,000-300,000 in regions under Brazilian control
- 1985: ~250,000-300,000 (minimal growth or decline despite high birth rates)

Territory loss:

1960: Indigenous peoples controlled ~10-15% of Brazilian territory (mostly Amazon)

1985: Indigenous peoples controlled ~8-10% of territory (lands formally demarcated plus areas still occupied)

Loss: Approximately 100-150 million hectares seized 1960-1985 through:

- Road construction
- Rancher invasions
- Government colonization projects
- Dam construction (flooding territories)
- Mining operations

Violence:

Massacres: Numerous documented massacres—ranchers, miners, or settlers attacking villages

Disease: Introduced diseases continued killing—measles, flu, tuberculosis

Forced contact: Government "pacification" programs forced contact with isolated groups, leading to population collapse

Cultural destruction: Children taken to boarding schools, forced assimilation programs

Examples:

Waimiri-Atroari (Amazon): Population declined from ~3,000 (1960) to ~350 (1985)—96% decline from violence and disease during road construction through their territory

Yanomami (Amazon): Gold rush in their territory (1970s-1980s) brought violence, mercury poisoning, disease

Guaraní-Kaiowá (Mato Grosso do Sul): Lost most territory to ranchers, forced onto tiny reserves

SPI/FUNAI failures:

SPI (1910-1967): Indian Protection Service was corrupt and ineffective

FUNAI (1967-present): National Indian Foundation replaced SPI but had limited power and resources. During dictatorship, FUNAI often facilitated land seizure rather than protecting indigenous rights.

Urban Poor: Favelas Expand

Urban population grew from 13 million (1940, 31% of total) to 80 million (1980, 68% of total). But housing and services didn't keep pace:

Favela growth:

Rio de Janeiro:

- 1950: ~170,000 favela residents (~7% of city)
- 1980: ~1.5 million favela residents (~23% of city)

São Paulo:

- 1950: ~50,000 favela residents (~2% of city)
- 1980: ~1 million favela residents (~10% of city)

Conditions in favelas:

Housing: Self-built shacks, usually wood or brick, unstable hillsides or floodplains

Infrastructure:

- No running water in early decades (gradually improved with public taps)
- No sewage (open sewers or none)
- Irregular electricity (often stolen connections)
- Unpaved roads/paths

Services:

- Few schools (children often dropped out for work)
- No healthcare facilities
- No police (except violent raids)
- No garbage collection

Employment:

- Informal sector: Street vendors, domestic workers, day laborers, hustlers
- Irregular income
- No benefits or protections

Violence:

- Police raids and brutality
- Crime and gang violence
- Lack of legal recourse

1985 favela resident:

- Income: Perhaps minimum wage or below (~5,000 cruzeiros/month, ~\$50 USD)
- Housing: Self-built shack, no security of tenure
- Education: Few years of primary school if any
- Healthcare: Emergency rooms only
- Future: Children would likely remain in favela

The Racial Dimension of Inequality

Throughout 1930-1985, racial hierarchy persisted and in some ways hardened:

1980 census income data (average monthly income):

White workers: 3.8x minimum wage (~\$380/month in 1980 dollars)

Mulatto workers: 2.0x minimum wage (~\$200/month)

Black workers: 1.6x minimum wage (~\$160/month)

Gap: White workers earned 2.4x what Black workers earned

Education gap (1980):

White Brazilians: Average 4.5 years of schooling
Mulatto Brazilians: Average 2.8 years of schooling
Black Brazilians: Average 2.4 years of schooling

Literacy (1980):

White Brazilians: 82% literate
Mulatto Brazilians: 68% literate
Black Brazilians: 60% literate

University access (1980):

White students: 2.5% of white 18-24 year-olds enrolled in university
Mulatto students: 0.6% of mulatto 18-24 year-olds enrolled
Black students: 0.4% of Black 18-24 year-olds enrolled

Occupation hierarchy (1980):

White collar (professionals, managers): 75-80% white, 15-20% mulatto, 3-5% Black
Blue collar (industrial workers): 50-60% white, 30-35% mulatto, 10-15% Black
Rural workers: 30-40% white, 35-40% mulatto, 20-25% Black
Domestic servants: 30-35% white, 35-40% mulatto, 25-30% Black

Industrialization didn't break racial hierarchy. It added layers—with whites dominating new professional/managerial positions while Blacks remained concentrated in lowest-paid work.

V. The Structures in 1985: What Persisted

Land Ownership

1985 land concentration:

Latifúndios (estates >1,000 hectares): 1% of properties controlled 45% of agricultural land

Medium properties (100-1,000 hectares): 9% of properties controlled 35% of land

Small properties (<100 hectares): 90% of properties controlled 20% of land

Minifúndios (tiny plots <10 hectares): 50% of properties controlled 2.5% of land

Comparison to 1930:

1930: Top 1% controlled ~48% of land
1985: Top 1% controlled ~45% of land

Concentration remained virtually unchanged despite 55 years of "development."

Who owned the land:

Same families (or their descendants) who owned land in 1930, plus new entrants (agribusiness corporations, land speculators) who bought land using profits from industry or finance.

Wealth and Income Distribution

1985 wealth distribution:

Top 10%: Controlled 55-60% of national wealth

Middle 40%: Controlled 30-35% of wealth

Bottom 50%: Controlled 5-10% of wealth

1985 income distribution (household income):

Richest 10%: Earned 47% of national income

Upper-middle 30%: Earned 35% of income

Lower-middle 30%: Earned 13% of income

Poorest 30%: Earned 5% of income

Brazil was one of the most unequal countries in the world—comparable to South Africa during apartheid.

Violence Monopoly

1985 security forces:

Military: ~300,000 active duty (Army, Navy, Air Force)

Military police: ~300,000 (state military police in all states)

Civil police: ~100,000 (investigative police)

Federal police: ~5,000

Private security: Perhaps 100,000-200,000 (legal private security plus illegal militias)

Total: ~800,000-900,000 armed personnel maintaining order

Rural militias: Landowners continued maintaining armed retainers—jagunços, pistoleiros (gunmen), private security. Difficult to quantify but certainly tens of thousands.

Who was armed:

State and elite: Military, police, private security—controlled by state and wealthy

Common people: Disarmed. Gun ownership restricted and heavily regulated. Urban poor and rural workers had no legal access to firearms.

Political use of violence 1964-1985:

Military killed/disappeared: ~400-500 political opponents

Police killings: Tens of thousands killed in "confrontations" (many actually extrajudicial executions)

Rural violence: Hundreds to thousands of rural workers, peasant activists, indigenous people killed by landowner militias

Prison violence: Torture and killing in prisons endemic

Education and Human Capital

1985 education statistics:

Literacy: 75% (up from 57% in 1950)—significant progress but 25% still illiterate

Average years of schooling: 3.9 years (national average)

Primary enrollment: 85% of children started primary school

Primary completion: 40% completed primary school (8 years)

Secondary enrollment: 30% of eligible teens enrolled in secondary

Secondary completion: 15% completed secondary

University enrollment: 1.4 million (~2% of 18-24 year-olds)

The class gap:

Elite children (top 10% families):

- 100% literate
- Average 10+ years of schooling
- Nearly all completed secondary
- 40-50% attended university

Middle-class children:

- 90%+ literate
- Average 6-8 years of schooling
- 50-60% completed primary, 30-40% completed secondary

- 5-10% attended university

Poor children:

- 60-70% literate
- Average 2-3 years of schooling
- 30-40% completed primary, 5-10% completed secondary
- <1% attended university

The racial gap:

White children: Average 4.5 years of schooling

Mulatto children: Average 2.8 years of schooling

Black children: Average 2.4 years of schooling

Economic Structure

1985 economy by sector:

Agriculture: 10-12% of GDP, 25% of employment

Industry: 35-40% of GDP, 25% of employment

Services: 48-55% of GDP, 50% of employment

Major exports (1985):

Manufactured goods: 55-60% of exports (machinery, vehicles, chemicals, steel)

Agricultural goods: 35-40% of exports (soybeans, coffee, sugar, meat, orange juice)

Minerals: 5-10% of exports (iron ore, aluminum)

Brazil had successfully industrialized—manufactured goods were now majority of exports. But agriculture remained crucial, and land concentration persisted.

Industrial ownership:

Multinationals: Ford, VW, GM dominated auto production. Foreign firms major presence in chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electronics

State companies: Petrobras (oil), Eletrobras (electricity), Vale (mining), Embraer (aircraft)

Brazilian private: Some large Brazilian corporations (Gerdau steel, Votorantim cement, etc.)—often owned by families with land and commercial wealth going back generations

The pattern: New wealth sectors (automobiles, petrochemicals, aircraft) controlled by multinationals and state. Traditional wealth (land, commerce, finance) remained with old elite families.

Elite Networks

By 1985, Brazilian elite had three interconnected components:

Landed elite: Agribusiness magnates owning vast estates—descended from old plantation families or recent entrants who bought land

Industrial elite: Owners of manufacturing firms—often connected to landed elite through marriage or business partnerships

Financial elite: Bankers, investors—often same families as landed and industrial elite

The Matarazzo example:

Count Francisco Matarazzo arrived from Italy 1881, made fortune in import-export and textiles, bought land, invested in industry. By 1985, Matarazzo family owned Grupo Ultra (chemicals and fuels), extensive landholdings, industrial properties—one of Brazil's richest families, six generations from plantation era but connected to it.

The pattern repeated: Elite families diversified from land into industry and finance while maintaining landholdings. New wealth tended to join old elite through marriage and business rather than challenging them.

Conclusion: Industrialization Without Transformation

Between 1930 and 1985, Brazil industrialized dramatically. It built automobile plants, petrochemical complexes, steel mills, aircraft factories. It created modern cities with skyscrapers and subways. It developed a sophisticated financial sector. By 1985, it was the world's eighth-largest economy.

Yet the extraction patterns established 1500-1822 and maintained 1822-1930 persisted through this transformation:

What changed:

Economic structure: Agriculture declined from 70% of GDP to 10-12%; industry grew from 15% to 35-40%

Urbanization: Rural population declined from 85% to 32%; cities grew explosively

Labor system: Formal urban workers gained rights through CLT

Technology: Modern factories, mechanized agriculture, infrastructure

Living standards: Urban middle class emerged with real prosperity

What didn't change:

Land concentration: Top 1% controlled ~45% of land (1930 and 1985)

Wealth inequality: Top 10% controlled 55-60% of wealth in 1985—similar or worse than 1930

Racial hierarchy: White families earned 2-3x Black families; white children attended university, Black children dropped out of primary school

Violence monopoly: Military, police, landowner militias controlled organized violence

Education inequality: Elite children averaged 10+ years of schooling, poor children 2-3 years

Rural poverty: Rural workers remained landless, poor, unprotected

Indigenous displacement: Lost 100-150 million hectares 1960-1985

Political power: Even with elections 1945-1964 and after 1985, elite controlled government

How this happened:

1. Labor rights were selective: CLT gave urban workers protection but explicitly excluded rural workers—maintaining two-tier system benefiting 25% while exploiting 75%

2. Land reform was killed: 1964 coup prevented redistribution, protecting elite landholdings

3. Modernization favored large operators: Agricultural credit, infrastructure, technology subsidies went to large landowners (80-90% of credit to top 10% of farms)

4. Industrialization was elite-led: New industrial wealth was created by or partnered with landed elite—not independent force challenging them

5. Violence suppressed alternatives: Military dictatorship 1964-1985 killed, tortured, and exiled those advocating redistribution

6. Education remained unequal: No universal quality education meant poor children couldn't compete with elite children for opportunities

7. Democracy was limited: Literacy requirements (until 1985), military interventions, and elite control of media and financing restricted democracy's transformative potential

The result:

By 1985, Brazil had two coexisting systems:

System 1 (Urban-Modern): Industrial workers with labor rights, middle-class professionals, modern infrastructure—looked like developed country

System 2 (Rural-Traditional): Landless workers, favela residents, indigenous peoples, rural poor—looked like colonial extraction system

Both were controlled by interconnected elite. The plantation senhores of 1822 had become the agribusiness-industrial-financial elite of 1985—often literally the same families.

The pattern:

Industrialization without land reform, without education equity, without violence democratization, without elite restraint = industrial extraction added to agricultural extraction rather than replacing it.

Part 4 will examine 1985-2025: Redemocratization bringing elections and civil liberties but not structural transformation. Neoliberal reforms opening economy but maintaining inequality. PT (Workers' Party) governments reducing poverty through social programs but not redistributing assets. The agribusiness boom making Brazil a global commodity superpower. And the question: After 525 years (1500-2025), did democracy finally break the extraction pattern, or does it persist under new management?

The evidence will show: Democracy without structural change enables resistance and improvement but doesn't guarantee transformation. Brazil in 2025 remains one of world's most unequal countries despite being a democracy since 1985. The patterns established in 1500s persist because the structures that matter—land ownership, violence capacity, education access, wealth concentration—were never broken.

End of Part 3

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Statistical Note:

Economic and social data for 1930-1985 comes from IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) censuses (1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980) and other government sources. Land ownership data is from agricultural censuses. Income distribution estimates use Gini coefficients and household survey data. Where data is incomplete, estimates use scholarly consensus ranges.

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Part: 3 of 4

Brazil: From Plantation Colony to Agribusiness Republic

Part 4 of 4: Democracy With Continuity (1985-2025)

Electoral Politics Without Structural Transformation

Introduction: Democracy Restored, Structures Intact

On January 15, 1985, the Brazilian Congress elected Tancredo Neves as Brazil's first civilian president in 21 years, ending military dictatorship. Neves died before taking office; his vice president José Sarney became president. On March 15, 1985, democracy returned to Brazil after two decades of military rule.

The next 40 years (1985-2025) would see Brazil consolidate democratic institutions: Regular elections, peaceful power transfers, free press, civil liberties, constitutional government. Eight presidents would serve—from centrists to leftists to far-right. The Workers' Party (PT) would govern for 13 years (2003-2016), implementing social programs that lifted tens of millions from extreme poverty. Brazil would become a global commodities superpower, feeding hundreds of millions worldwide.

Yet by 2025—525 years after Portuguese colonization began—the fundamental extraction patterns persisted. Land remained concentrated: The largest 1% of properties controlled 47% of agricultural land in 2017 (latest agricultural census). Wealth inequality remained extreme: The richest 10% owned 75% of national wealth in 2022. Racial hierarchy persisted: White Brazilians earned 73% more than Black Brazilians in 2022. Violence monopoly remained: Police killed 6,000+ people annually in 2010s-2020s, overwhelmingly Black and poor. Education gaps remained vast: Elite children attended private universities while poor children dropped out of secondary school.

This final part examines democracy's 40 years: Did electoral politics finally break the structures established in the 1500s? Or did they persist under new management—with elections, parties, and civil liberties coexisting alongside concentrated land ownership, racial hierarchy, and elite wealth extraction?

The answer requires examining three periods: Redemocratization and neoliberal reforms (1985-2002), PT governments bringing poverty reduction without asset redistribution (2003-2016), and the Bolsonaro backlash followed by Lula's return (2016-2025).

The central finding: Democracy enables resistance, allows policy improvements, and provides spaces for challenging extraction—but doesn't guarantee structural transformation. Without land reform, education equity, violence democratization, and wealth redistribution, democracy becomes a system where people vote but fundamental power relationships remain unchanged.

I. Redemocratization and Neoliberal Reforms (1985-2002)

The 1988 Constitution: Rights Without Redistribution

Brazil's democratic constitution, promulgated October 5, 1988, was called the "Citizen Constitution" for its extensive rights guarantees:

Political rights:

- Universal suffrage (illiterates could finally vote)
- Direct elections for president, congress, governors, mayors
- Multiple political parties
- Freedom of speech, press, assembly

Social rights:

- Healthcare as universal right (SUS—Unified Health System)
- Public education as right
- Labor rights extended and protected
- Social security and retirement
- Housing as right

Environmental protections:

- Amazon protection mandates
- Indigenous land rights recognized
- Environmental impact requirements

The achievements were real: This was Brazil's most democratic constitution ever. Millions who had been excluded could now vote. Rights were constitutionally protected.

But the critical omissions:

No land reform mandate: The constitution recognized that property must serve "social function," but included no deadline, no mechanism, no enforcement for redistributing land. Large landowners successfully lobbied to weaken land reform provisions.

No wealth tax: No progressive wealth taxation, no inheritance tax above minimal levels, no mechanisms forcing wealth redistribution.

Military maintained power: Military retained significant autonomy—control over Amazonian borders, indigenous policy involvement, "guarantee of law and order" mission allowing intervention.

Police structure unchanged: Military police remained in states—same forces that had killed during dictatorship, same structure, same training.

Education quality not addressed: Constitution mandated free public education but didn't address quality gap between elite private schools and poor public schools.

The Collor Disaster (1990-1992)

Fernando Collor de Mello won Brazil's first direct presidential election in 29 years (1989), defeating Workers' Party candidate Lula da Silva. Collor's presidency demonstrated democracy's vulnerability to elite manipulation:

Collor's background: Heir to media empire, governor of small state (Alagoas), no significant political experience but enormous resources and media access.

Campaign: Promised to fight corruption, modernize Brazil, attacked PT as communist threat.

Presidency (1990-1992):

Immediate shock: Froze bank accounts (confiscating savings to fight inflation)—destroyed middle-class savings, caused economic chaos.

Neoliberal reforms: Began opening economy—reduced tariffs, privatized state companies, cut government spending.

Corruption: Massive corruption scheme discovered—Collor's campaign treasurer was extorting businesses for bribes.

Impeachment: Congress impeached Collor in December 1992 after months of protests. Vice President Itamar Franco took over.

What it showed: Democracy could elect demagogues. Wealth and media access could win elections despite lack of qualifications. Constitutional checks (impeachment) worked—but only after enormous damage.

The Real Plan and FHC (1994-2002)

Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso implemented the Real Plan (1994) to end hyperinflation that had plagued Brazil for decades:

The plan:

- New currency (Real, replacing Cruzeiro)
- Central bank independence
- Fiscal discipline
- Privatization of state companies

Success: Inflation fell from ~2,500% annually (1993) to ~5-10% annually (1995-2002). This was revolutionary—Brazilians could plan, save, and invest again.

FHC presidency (1995-2002):

Cardoso was elected president (1994) and re-elected (1998) on Real Plan's success. His government implemented sweeping neoliberal reforms:

Privatization: Sold state companies:

- Telebrás (telecommunications)—\$19 billion
- Vale (mining)—\$3.3 billion
- State electricity companies—billions more
- State banks privatized or restructured

Financial opening: Opened financial markets to foreign investment—hot money flowed in and out, creating volatility.

Trade liberalization: Reduced tariffs further—imports surged, destroying some domestic industries.

Labor flexibility: Made labor laws more flexible—weakened CLT protections somewhat.

Fiscal discipline: Controlled government spending through Fiscal Responsibility Law.

What improved:

- Inflation stayed low
- Economy grew (modestly—average ~2.5% annually)
- Poverty declined somewhat
- Foreign investment increased

What didn't change:

- Land concentration unchanged—no land reform
- Inequality stayed extreme—Gini coefficient ~0.59-0.60 (among world's highest)
- Racial wealth gap unchanged
- Violence increased—homicide rates rose
- Education quality gap persisted
- Unemployment rose to 12-13% by early 2000s

The FHC assessment:

Cardoso stabilized the economy and consolidated democracy—major achievements. But his neoliberal reforms benefited elites disproportionately:

Privatizations: State assets sold at discounted prices to connected buyers—often the same elite families who had accumulated wealth across generations.

Financial opening: Benefited those with capital to invest—not the poor.

Labor flexibility: Weakened protections for formal workers—helped employers, hurt employees.

Trade liberalization: Benefited consumers (cheaper imports) but devastated some industries and their workers.

The MST and Rural Conflict (1985-2002)

While cities democratized and stabilized, rural areas remained violent:

MST growth:

The Landless Workers' Movement (formed 1984) expanded dramatically after redemocratization:

1985: ~30,000 families in MST occupations

1995: ~150,000 families in occupations or settlements

2002: ~300,000 families settled, ~80,000 in occupations

MST strategy:

1. Occupy unproductive large estate
2. Establish encampment
3. Pressure government for expropriation
4. Create settlement with cooperative farming, schools, healthcare

Government responses:

Sarney (1985-1990): Promised land reform, delivered minimal—perhaps 90,000 families settled.

Collor/Franco (1990-1994): Virtually no land reform—political chaos prevented focus.

FHC (1995-2002): Settled ~500,000 families—but often on poor land, with inadequate support. Simultaneously repressed MST severely.

Rural violence:

April 17, 1996—Eldorado dos Carajás Massacre: Military police in Pará state ambushed MST march on highway, killing 19 landless workers, wounding 69. Police fired at close range, executed wounded. No one was convicted until 2012—16 years later. Two officers received sentences but others acquitted.

Pattern repeated: Landless workers occupied land, landowners hired gunmen (pistoleiros) or called police, violence ensued. Between 1985-2002, approximately 1,500-2,000 rural workers, union activists, priests, and lawyers were murdered in land conflicts. Few killers were ever prosecuted.

The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT): Catholic Church organization documented rural violence:

1985-2002 totals:

- ~1,900 rural workers murdered
- ~1,000 death threats documented
- ~200 attempted murders
- Prosecution rate: <10% of cases

Who was killed:

- Landless workers occupying land
- Union organizers
- Peasant leaders
- Progressive priests
- Lawyers representing rural workers
- Environmental activists (increasingly, as forest defense became land defense)

Who did the killing:

- Pistoleiros hired by landowners
- Private security (legal and illegal)
- Military police during evictions
- Civil police (occasionally)

The pattern: Democracy allowed MST to organize openly and pressure government—this was progress. But violence against rural workers continued with impunity. Elite's land ownership was defended through killing, just as in colonial and imperial eras.

II. The PT Governments: Poverty Reduction Without Redistribution (2003-2016)

Lula's Rise and First Term (2003-2006)

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—metalworker, union leader, Workers' Party founder—was elected president in October 2002 after three failed attempts. He took office January 1, 2003, promising to end hunger and reduce poverty.

Lula's background made him unique:

- Born poor in Northeast (Pernambuco), migrated to São Paulo as child
- Worked in auto factories, lost finger in industrial accident
- Led metalworkers' strikes during dictatorship
- Founded PT (Workers' Party) in 1980
- First working-class president in Brazilian history

The "Letter to the Brazilian People" (June 2002):

Before election, Lula published open letter promising:

- Respect existing contracts (including debt payments)
- Maintain inflation-targeting regime
- Keep central bank independence
- No radical changes

This reassured markets and elites that PT wouldn't expropriate wealth or default on debts. It was necessary to win—but it constrained what PT could do.

First term achievements (2003-2006):

Bolsa Família (Family Grant):

The signature program—cash transfers to poor families conditional on keeping children in school and taking them to health appointments:

2003: ~3.6 million families enrolled, ~\$570 million annually

2006: ~11 million families enrolled, ~\$2.5 billion annually

Amount: Varied by family size and income, typically ~\$12-40 per month (2006 values)

Impact: Reduced extreme poverty significantly. Families could buy food, keep children in school. Simple, direct, effective.

Minimum wage increases:

Lula raised minimum wage substantially:

2003: 240 reais/month (~\$80 USD)

2006: 350 reais/month (~\$155 USD)

Real terms (accounting for inflation): ~20% increase. This helped all formal workers since many salaries were tied to minimum wage multiples.

Economic growth:

Brazil grew strongly during Lula's first term—helped by global commodity boom (soybeans, iron ore, beef prices rising):

Average growth: ~4% annually (2003-2006)

Unemployment: Fell from 13% (2003) to 9% (2006)

Formal employment: Increased by 5+ million jobs

What didn't happen:

No land reform: Lula settled ~130,000 families (2003-2006)—comparable to FHC but far below PT's historical demands.

No wealth tax: Despite PT's platform including progressive taxation, Lula didn't implement wealth taxes.

No inheritance tax: Inheritance taxes remained minimal—allowing wealth concentration across generations.

No serious indigenous land protection: Despite promises, Amazon deforestation remained high (though it would fall in second term).

No police reform: Police killings continued—3,000-4,000 annually during first term.

No education transformation: Public education quality remained poor; elite children still attended private schools and universities.

Second Term: Accelerated Growth (2007-2010)

Lula's re-election (2006) gave him mandate to expand programs:

Bolsa Família expansion:

2010: ~13 million families enrolled (~50 million people—25% of population), ~\$7 billion annually

PAC (Growth Acceleration Program):

Massive infrastructure investment:

- Roads, bridges, ports
- Housing (Minha Casa Minha Vida—"My House My Life"—built 1+ million houses 2009-2010)
- Sanitation improvements

Minimum wage:

2010: 510 reais/month (~\$290 USD at 2010 exchange rate)—another ~25% real increase since 2006.

Pre-Sal oil discovery:

Discovery of massive offshore oil reserves (2007) promised future wealth—though production wouldn't peak until 2020s.

The 2008-2009 global crisis:

Brazil weathered global financial crisis remarkably well:

- Government stimulus maintained consumption
- Commodity exports to China continued
- Domestic market strong due to minimum wage/Bolsa Família
- GDP fell only 0.2% (2009), then grew 7.5% (2010)

The results:

By 2010, poverty had fallen dramatically:

Extreme poverty (living on <\$1.90/day PPP):

- 2003: 14% of population
- 2010: 5% of population

Poverty (living on <\$5.50/day PPP):

- 2003: 28% of population
- 2010: 17% of population

Millions lifted from misery. This was not propaganda—it was measurable reality. People who had been hungry could eat. Children stayed in school. Families moved from shacks to houses.

Lula left office (January 2011) with 87% approval rating—highest ever recorded for Brazilian president.

Dilma's Presidency: Stagnation and Crisis (2011-2016)

Dilma Rousseff—former guerrilla, torture survivor, Lula's chief of staff—was elected president (2010) as Lula's chosen successor. Her presidency would end in impeachment.

First term (2011-2014):

Continuity: Maintained Bolsa Família, minimum wage increases, PAC infrastructure.

Economic slowdown: Growth decelerated:

- 2011: 4.0%
- 2012: 1.9%
- 2013: 3.0%
- 2014: 0.5%

Reasons: Commodity boom ending, Chinese demand slowing, domestic investments stalling, political opposition obstructing.

June 2013 protests:

Mass protests began over bus fare increases, expanded to general dissatisfaction:

- Millions in streets across Brazil
- Diverse demands: better public services, anti-corruption, political reform
- No clear leadership or program
- Showed middle class was discontent despite poverty reduction

Re-election (2014):

Dilma narrowly won re-election (51.6% vs. 48.4%) against Aécio Neves. Opposition refused to accept legitimacy. The agribusiness elite—enriched during PT years through commodity boom—turned against PT.

Second term crisis (2015-2016):

Economic recession:

- 2015: -3.5% GDP growth
- 2016: -3.3% GDP growth
- Unemployment rose to 12%+
- Inflation rose to ~10%

Lava Jato (Car Wash) investigation:

Massive corruption investigation uncovered systematic bribes at Petrobras (state oil company):

- Construction companies paid bribes for contracts
- Politicians from all parties received kickbacks
- PT officials heavily implicated
- Lula himself investigated (though charges were questionable)

Impeachment (2016):

Congress impeached Dilma (August 2016) for budget manipulation—technical violation that previous presidents had committed without consequence. The real reason: Political and economic elites wanted PT removed.

Vice President Michel Temer (centrist politician) took over.

What PT Achieved and What It Didn't

The achievements (2003-2016):

Poverty reduction:

- 36 million lifted from extreme poverty
- Hunger dramatically reduced
- Inequality fell (Gini coefficient from 0.59 to 0.52)
- Minimum wage increased 75% in real terms
- Formal employment increased by 20+ million

Social programs:

- Bolsa Família helping 50+ million
- 18+ million people attended university (expansion through new federal universities and quotas)
- Healthcare access improved (SUS expansion)

Economic inclusion:

- Credit access for poor (microfinance)
- Small business support
- "New middle class" (Class C) grew from ~30% to ~50% of population

These gains were real and significant. Millions of people's lives materially improved. Children who would have been hungry were fed. This matters enormously.

What PT didn't achieve:

No land reform:

2003: 1% of properties controlled 45% of land

2017: 1% of properties controlled 47% of land (2017 agricultural census—latest data)

Concentration **increased** during PT rule.

No wealth redistribution:

2003: Top 10% owned 72% of wealth

2014: Top 10% owned 74% of wealth

Wealth concentration **increased** despite poverty reduction.

No education transformation:

Public schools: Quality remained poor—Brazil ranked 60th-70th globally in PISA education rankings

Private schools: Elite children attended expensive private schools preparing them for top universities

University access: Expanded but still limited—only 15% of 18-24 year-olds in university by 2014

Quality gap: Persisted and arguably widened

No police reform:

Police killings: Continued at 3,000-4,000+ annually throughout PT rule

Prison population: Exploded—400,000 (2003) to 700,000 (2016)

War on drugs: Continued militarized approach in favelas

No political reform:

Campaign financing: Continued corporate money dominance in politics

Electoral system: Unchanged (proportional representation enabling fragmentation)

Media concentration: Few families controlled major media—hostile to PT

Rural violence continued:

2003-2016: Approximately 1,000+ rural workers, activists, indigenous people murdered in land/forest conflicts. Impunity rate remained >90%.

Why these limitations?

Political constraints: PT never had congressional majority—needed coalitions with centrist parties requiring concessions

Economic model: PT accepted commodity-export model and agribusiness dominance—didn't challenge fundamental economic structure

Elite power: Landowners, industrialists, financiers, media owners retained enormous power—could resist structural reforms

"Letter to Brazilian People": Lula's 2002 commitment to respect existing contracts and avoid radical changes constrained options

PT's choice: Focus on poverty reduction through social programs rather than wealth redistribution through asset seizure—this was politically feasible but left structures intact

III. The Temer-Bolsonaro Backlash (2016-2022)

Temer's Austerity (2016-2018)

Michel Temer—centrist politician who had been Dilma's vice president but conspired in her impeachment—took office in August 2016 and immediately implemented elite-friendly reforms:

Spending cap (2016): Constitutional amendment freezing government spending growth for 20 years—devastating for public services, education, healthcare.

Labor reform (2017): Weakened CLT protections:

- Made contracts more flexible
- Allowed negotiation to supersede law
- Facilitated firing
- Undermined unions

Pension reform attempt: Tried to raise retirement age and reduce benefits—but too unpopular, abandoned.

Privatizations: Sold state assets to private buyers.

Impact:

Unemployment: Rose to 13%+ (2017)

Poverty: Increased—3+ million returned to poverty 2016-2018

Inequality: Increased—Gini coefficient rose back toward 0.55

Who benefited: Corporations, wealthy—austerity reduced their tax burden, labor reforms reduced their costs.

Bolsonaro's Election and Presidency (2018-2022)

Jair Bolsonaro—former army captain, seven-term congressman known for authoritarian nostalgia and offensive statements—won presidency in October 2018:

Campaign appeals:

- Anti-PT sentiment (Lava Jato corruption scandal)
- Anti-crime promises (violence had risen)
- Social conservatism (opposition to LGBTQ rights, feminism, secularism)
- Economic liberalism (promises to shrink government)
- Pro-military/police (promised free hand to police)
- Agribusiness support (promised to open Amazon for development)

Background:

- Admired military dictatorship, said it should have killed more
- Made racist, sexist, and homophobic statements routinely
- Had virtually no policy expertise
- Relied on social media to circumvent traditional media

Presidency (2019-2022):**Economy Minister Paulo Guedes (University of Chicago-trained economist):**

Pension reform (2019): Raised retirement age, reduced benefits—saving government money but hurting poor elderly.

Privatization: Continued selling state assets.

Deregulation: Reduced labor protections further, environmental regulations, business regulations.

Minimal economic growth:

- 2019: 1.2%
- 2020: -3.9% (COVID-19)
- 2021: 5.0% (recovery)
- 2022: 2.8%

Amazon devastation:

Bolsonaro gutted environmental protections:

Deforestation:

- 2019: 10,129 km² deforested
- 2020: 10,851 km²
- 2021: 13,038 km²
- 2022: 11,568 km²

These were highest levels since 2008. Bolsonaro openly encouraged illegal logging, mining, and ranching in protected areas.

Indigenous peoples: Suffered dramatically:

- Invasions of indigenous territories by miners and loggers increased 180%
- Violence against indigenous people increased
- COVID-19 devastated communities (government provided minimal support)
- Territories shrank as illegal occupations were legitimized

COVID-19 catastrophe (2020-2022):

Brazil had one of world's worst COVID responses:

Deaths: 700,000+ (official count)—likely 800,000-1 million actual

Bolsonaro's actions:

- Denied severity ("just a little flu")
- Opposed lockdowns and masks
- Delayed vaccine purchases
- Promoted unproven treatments (chloroquine, ivermectin)
- Fired health ministers who contradicted him
- Held mass rallies without masks

Class dimension: Poor people died at much higher rates—they couldn't work from home, lived in crowded conditions, lacked healthcare access.

Violence and police killings:

Bolsonaro gave police free hand:

Police killings:

- 2019: 6,357 killed by police
- 2020: 6,416
- 2021: 6,145

90%+ of victims were Black or brown.

Bolsonaro celebrated violence: "A good criminal is a dead criminal."

Political violence:

Bolsonaro supporters attacked:

- Opposition politicians
- Journalists
- LGBTQ people
- Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners
- Environmental activists

Climate of fear intensified. Murders of rural activists reached highest levels since redemocratization.

Democratic threats:

Bolsonaro openly questioned democracy:

- Praised dictatorship repeatedly
- Questioned electoral system without evidence
- Threatened not to accept defeat
- Called for military intervention
- Surrounded himself with military officers (many cabinet positions)

The 2022 election:

Lula returned from exile (courts annulled his convictions as politically motivated) and challenged Bolsonaro.

Results (October 2022):

- First round: Lula 48.4%, Bolsonaro 43.2%
- Runoff: Lula 50.9%, Bolsonaro 49.1%

Lula won by 2 million votes—but Bolsonaro's strong showing (49%!) showed how divided Brazil had become.

January 8, 2023 attack: Bolsonaro supporters stormed Congress, Supreme Court, and Presidential Palace in attempted coup—inspired by January 6, 2021 US Capitol attack. Military did not join. Coup failed.

IV. Lula's Third Term and Brazil in 2025

Lula's Return (2023-2025)

Lula took office January 1, 2023, for his third term at age 77. His coalition was broad—left to center—requiring compromises.

Immediate priorities:

Restore Bolsa Familia: Renamed "Bolsa Família" again (Bolsonaro had renamed it), increased payments.

Minimum wage: Raised to 1,320 reais/month (January 2023)—real increase restoring purchasing power lost under Bolsonaro.

Amazon protection: Named Marina Silva as Environment Minister—deforestation fell 50% in first year (2023).

Indigenous land demarcation: Began process to demarcate indigenous territories Bolsonaro had blocked.

Fiscal constraints:

Spending cap (Temer's 2016 amendment) constrained ability to increase social spending. Lula negotiated new fiscal framework (2023) allowing limited spending growth.

Economic challenges:

2023: 2.9% growth

2024 projection: ~2-3% growth

Inflation: ~4-5% (under control)

Unemployment: ~7-8%

Political obstacles:

Congress remained conservative—agribusiness caucus had 300+ members (of 513 total deputies). Any land reform or wealth tax faced impossible opposition.

Brazil in 2025: The Structures That Persist

After 40 years of democracy (1985-2025) and 525 years since Portuguese colonization began (1500-2025), what has changed and what persists?

Land ownership (2025):

2017 agricultural census (latest comprehensive data):

Largest 1% of properties: Controlled 47.5% of agricultural land

Largest 10%: Controlled 73% of land

Smallest 50%: Controlled 2.3% of land

Comparison to 1985: Virtually identical concentration.

Comparison to 1930: Nearly identical.

Comparison to 1822: Probably similar or slightly less concentrated only because total agricultural area expanded through seizure of Amazon/cerrado indigenous lands.

Who owns the land (2025):

Traditional families: Many of the largest landholdings are held by families whose wealth traces back generations—to coffee plantations (1850s-1930s), to sugar plantations (1600s-1800s), in some cases lineages going back 300-400 years.

Agribusiness corporations: Modern corporations (some with foreign ownership) own huge estates—but often led by Brazilians from old elite families.

New wealth: Some new entrants from industrial/financial wealth who bought land—but usually joining elite rather than challenging it.

Examples of continuity:

The Moreira Salles family: Banking fortune (Unibanco, founded 1924), invested in land and culture—descended from coffee elite.

The Ermírio de Moraes family: Votorantim Group (cement, mining, metals, agribusiness)—fortune built 1910s-1930s, still controlled by family.

The Marinho family: Media empire (Globo TV network, dominant broadcaster)—founded 1925, still family-controlled.

Matarazzo legacy: Though original fortune declined, derivatives remain wealthy.

New agribusiness elite: Blairo Maggi (soy king—family owns 500,000+ hectares), but even "new" wealth is often 2-3 generations old now.

Wealth inequality (2025):

2022 data (Wealth-X and Credit Suisse):

Top 1%: Own 49% of wealth

Top 10%: Own 75% of wealth

Bottom 50%: Own 1% of wealth

Comparison: Similar to or worse than 1985, worse than during peak PT period (2010-2014).

Racial wealth gap (2025):

2022 IBGE data:

Average income:

- White Brazilians: 3,099 reais/month
- Black Brazilians: 1,794 reais/month
- Ratio: Whites earn 73% more

Homeownership:

- White families: 67% own homes
- Black families: 52% own homes

University completion:

- White adults: 23% completed university
- Black adults: 11% completed university

Wealth:

- White families average ~100,000-150,000 reais in assets
- Black families average ~30,000-50,000 reais in assets
- Ratio: 3-5x wealth gap

Violence and police killings (2025):**Police killings:**

- 2019: 6,357
- 2020: 6,416
- 2021: 6,145
- 2022: 6,429
- 2023: 6,393

Victims' profile: 84% Black or brown, 98% male, 75% aged 15-29, overwhelmingly from favelas and peripheries.

Prison population: 850,000+ (2023)—third-largest in world (after US and China).

Rural violence: 2023 saw 118 rural workers, activists, and indigenous people murdered in land/resource conflicts—highest since 2004.

Education inequality (2025):

PISA 2022 results: Brazil ranked 64th globally in reading, 68th in math, 63rd in science—among worst performers despite being 8th-largest economy.

But this average masks class gap:

Elite private schools: Perform at European levels—students score 500+ on PISA.

Poor public schools: Perform at 350-400 on PISA—far below global average.

University access (2024):

- 21% of 18-24 year-olds enrolled in university
- But class/race gap enormous:
 - Richest 20%: 50%+ enroll
 - Poorest 20%: <5% enroll

Political power (2025):

Congress composition:

Agribusiness caucus: 300+ of 513 deputies, 40+ of 81 senators—blocks any land reform

Evangelical caucus: 200+ deputies—social conservative agenda

Finance/business interests: Heavily represented

Progressive caucus: 60-80 deputies—minority

Media concentration: 5-6 family groups control 90%+ of major television, radio, print media.

Campaign financing: Despite reforms, wealthy candidates and business interests dominate.

V. Conclusion: 525 Years of Patterns

What Changed, What Persisted

Between 1500 and 2025, Brazil experienced dramatic transformations:

Political regimes:

- Portuguese colony (1500-1822)
- Empire (1822-1889)
- Old Republic (1889-1930)
- Vargas era (1930-1945)
- Democracy (1945-1964)
- Military dictatorship (1964-1985)
- Democracy (1985-2025)

Economic systems:

- Sugar plantation slavery (1550-1700)
- Gold mining slavery (1700-1770)
- Coffee plantation slavery (1820-1888)
- Coffee plantation wage labor (1888-1930)
- Import-substitution industrialization (1930-1990)
- Neoliberal opening (1990-2003)
- Commodity-export boom (2003-2014)
- Agribusiness dominance (2010-2025)

Labor systems:

- Indigenous slavery (1500-1700)
- African slavery (1550-1888)
- Sharecropping/debt bondage (1888-1930)
- Urban formal labor with rights (1943-2025)
- Rural labor with minimal rights (1963-2025)

Population:

- 1500: 2-3 million (mostly indigenous)
- 1822: 4.5 million (30% enslaved)
- 1890: 14 million (newly freed population)
- 1940: 41 million (beginning urbanization)
- 1980: 121 million (67% urban)
- 2025: 215 million (87% urban)

These changes were massive. Brazil in 2025 is unrecognizable from 1500, 1822, or even 1950.

Yet fundamental structures persisted:

Land concentration:

- 1822: Top 2-3,000 families controlled 90%+ of land
- 1930: Top 5-8,000 families controlled 85-90%
- 1985: Top 1% of properties controlled 45%
- 2025: Top 1% of properties control 47.5%

Wealth inequality:

- 1822: Top 1% owned ~60-70% of wealth (estimate)
- 1930: Top 1% owned ~55-65% (estimate)
- 1985: Top 1% owned ~45-50%
- 2025: Top 1% own 49%

Racial hierarchy:

- 1822: Portuguese/whites at top, Blacks at bottom
- 1930: Whites at top, mulatto middle, Blacks bottom
- 1985: Whites earned 2-3x Blacks
- 2025: Whites earn 1.73x Blacks, 3-5x wealth gap

Violence monopoly:

- 1822: Portuguese military + senhores' private militias
- 1930: Federal military + state forces + coronéis' jagunços
- 1985: Military + police + landowner militias

- 2025: Military + police (killing 6,000+/year) + private security/militias

Education access:

- 1822: 5-10% literate, elite monopoly
- 1930: 25% literate, elite private schools
- 1985: 75% literate, but elite-poor gap in quality
- 2025: 93% literate, but elite-poor gap in quality wider

Political power:

- 1822: Elite monopoly (property requirement for voting)
- 1930: Elite monopoly (literacy requirement)
- 1985: Universal suffrage BUT elite control through wealth, media, Congress
- 2025: Universal suffrage BUT elite control through wealth, media, Congress

Why Structures Persisted Despite Changes

1. Elite-led transitions preserved interests:

1822 independence: Led by elites, protected their land and slaves

1888 abolition: No land redistribution, freed people remained landless

1889 republic: Elite power-sharing, not popular revolution

1930 Vargas revolution: Accommodation with landowners, not confrontation

1964 coup: Specifically to prevent land reform

1985 redemocratization: Negotiated transition, military retained power

Each transition was managed by or accommodated elites who protected their interests.

2. Democracy without structural change = limited transformation:

Brazil has had democracy for 40 years (1985-2025). Yet:

- Land not redistributed (agribusiness caucus blocks reform)
- Wealth not taxed progressively (elite resistance)
- Police not reformed (military police structure intact)
- Education not equalized (public schools underfunded)

Democratic elections allow policy improvements (Bolsa Família, minimum wage) but don't force structural changes if elites control Congress, media, campaign finance, and courts.

3. Industrialization added extraction, didn't replace it:

Brazil industrialized dramatically 1930-1985. But rather than industry replacing plantation agriculture, both coexisted:

- Old plantation families invested in industry
- Industrial wealth bought land
- Agribusiness modernized using industrial profits
- Result: Combined elite controlling both sectors

4. Poverty reduction without asset redistribution = limited mobility:

PT governments (2003-2016) lifted 36 million from extreme poverty—major achievement. But they did so through social programs (Bolsa Família) and wage increases, not through redistributing land or wealth.

Result: Poor people could eat better, but they didn't acquire assets. When PT lost power (2016), programs could be cut and poverty returned.

Asset ownership creates permanent gains. Cash transfers create temporary relief.

5. Racial hierarchy reinforced across each transformation:

Every transition maintained racial hierarchy:

- Abolition (1888) without land left Blacks poor
- Immigration (1880-1930) privileged Europeans over Blacks
- Industrialization (1930-1985) gave whites better jobs
- Democracy (1985-2025) didn't break wage/wealth gaps

6. Violence monopoly never challenged:

Throughout 525 years, organized violence remained monopolized by state and elite:

- Military never disbanded or democratized
- Police structure never reformed (same military police from dictatorship)
- Private militias never disarmed
- Poor remained disarmed and vulnerable

This violence was used consistently to suppress challenges: slave revolts (1500-1888), peasant organizing (1950s-1964), rural occupations (1985-2025), favela protests (1980s-2025).

What Would Have Broken the Pattern?

Looking at 525 years of history, what would have actually transformed Brazil?

Land reform—actual redistribution:

If 1888 abolition had included land grants, or if 1964 coup hadn't prevented reform, or if MST demands had been met in 1990s-2000s, Brazil would be different. When most people own land, extraction becomes difficult.

Progressive wealth taxation:

If Brazil had implemented serious inheritance taxes, wealth taxes, progressive income taxes, accumulated wealth couldn't have passed across generations. Each generation would start more equal.

Education equity:

If PT had prioritized making public schools equal to elite private schools, rather than just expanding access, poor children could compete with elite children. Education is the most powerful equalizer if quality is equal.

Police and military reform:

If redemocratization had disbanded military police and created civilian police accountable to communities, violence would have decreased and poor people could organize without fear.

Campaign finance reform:

If Brazil had implemented public campaign financing and banned corporate money, elite couldn't buy politicians and elections as easily.

Constitutional assembly with proportional representation:

If 1988 constitution had been written by assembly representing Brazil proportionally (including rural workers, favela residents, indigenous peoples, Blacks), it might have mandated redistribution.

None of these happened because elite power prevented them. The structures persisted because those who benefited from them had the power to block transformation.

The Answer to the Question

The core question this case study asked: What happened to the average Brazilian between 1500 and 2025, and what specific structures, choices, and dynamics determined whether their life improved or remained extractive?

The answer:

If you were Black or indigenous: Your ancestors were enslaved or exterminated. In 2025, you earn 58% what white Brazilians earn, own 1/3 to 1/5 the assets, face 6,000 police killings

annually (targeting your communities), and have 1/2 the chance of completing university. The racial hierarchy established in 1500s persists.

If you are rural worker: Your ancestors worked on plantations as slaves or landless laborers. In 2025, you remain landless, earn poverty wages, face violence if you organize (118 killed in 2023), have minimal education access, and watch as 1% of properties control 47.5% of land. The plantation system established in 1550s persists in modernized form (agribusiness).

If you are urban poor (favela resident): Your family migrated from plantations to cities. In 2025, you live in informal housing, work informal jobs with no benefits, face police violence (6,000+ killed annually), send children to underfunded schools, and have minimal wealth accumulation. You're better off than rural poor, but trapped in poverty across generations.

If you are urban middle class: Your family benefited from industrialization, CLT labor rights, and PT-era programs. You own a home, have formal employment, can educate children, and have modest security. You are far better off than 1930, though vulnerable to economic shocks and unable to match elite's wealth accumulation.

If you are elite: Your family accumulated wealth across generations through land ownership (since 1550s-1800s), through industrial/commercial success (1900s-present), or through professional positions. In 2025, you own land and assets worth millions to billions, send children to best private schools and top universities, control businesses, influence politics, and live securely. Your advantages compound across generations through inheritance, networks, and power.

The dynamic that made life better (where it improved):

Democratic organizing and state investment: Urban workers gained CLT rights through organizing (1940s-1950s). Poor gained Bolsa Família through PT election (2003). Minimum wage increased through political pressure. Democracy allowed these gains.

But limited by structures: Gains were limited by elite control of land, wealth, violence, and politics. Programs could be cut (Temer did so 2016-2018). Wages could stagnate. Improvements were real but reversible.

The dynamic that maintained extraction:

Elite control of asset ownership + violence monopoly + political power = ability to block redistribution:

Landowners blocked land reform (1964 coup proves this). Wealthy blocked progressive taxation (Congress control). Media monopoly shaped discourse. Police/military suppressed organizing. This structure—established in 1500s, maintained through every transition—persists in 2025.

Final Assessment

Brazil in 2025, after 525 years, demonstrates that:

Political regime changes (colony→empire→republic→democracy) don't guarantee structural transformation. Democracy is necessary but not sufficient. Brazil has been democratic for 40 years but land, wealth, violence, and education structures remain from plantation era.

Economic modernization (agriculture→industry→services) doesn't break extraction patterns. Brazil industrialized dramatically but old elites adapted—investing industrial wealth in land, mechanizing plantations, controlling new sectors. Extraction was modernized, not ended.

Abolition without assets creates legal freedom but economic dependence. Freed people in 1888 received nothing. In 2025, Black Brazilians remain at bottom of economic hierarchy—direct line from slavery to contemporary poverty.

Poverty reduction without asset redistribution creates temporary improvements. PT lifted millions from misery—real achievement. But without giving them land, capital, or quality education, the gains were vulnerable. Austerity (2016-2018) and COVID (2020-2022) pushed millions back into poverty.

Elite power, once established, persists across generations unless forcibly broken. The families who owned land in 1822 (or their business partners/descendants) often own land and wealth in 2025. Without wealth taxes, inheritance taxes, or expropriation, accumulated advantages compound.

The extraction system established 1500-1822 persists in 2025—modernized but recognizable:

- Same land concentration (top 1% control ~47%)
- Same racial hierarchy (whites earn 73% more than Blacks)
- Same violence monopoly (police kill 6,000+/year, targeting Black/poor)
- Same education inequality (elite private schools vs. failing public schools)
- Same political power (agribusiness caucus controls Congress)
- Same wealth concentration (top 1% own 49% of wealth)

What changed: Slavery ended, democracy exists, urban workers have rights, extreme poverty declined, literacy increased, infrastructure modernized.

What persisted: Asset ownership patterns, racial wealth gaps, violence against poor, education quality gaps, elite political dominance.

Brazil in 2025 is a democracy with elections and rights, coexisting with plantation-era extraction structures. The case study confirms the hypothesis: Elite extraction persists across regime changes when fundamental structures (land ownership, violence monopoly, education access, wealth concentration) remain intact.

The pattern is visible, documented, and persistent across 525 years. That is what the evidence shows.

End of Brazil Case Study

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Final Statistical Note:

Data for 1985-2025 comes from IBGE censuses and surveys, World Bank databases, academic studies, and NGO reports. Land ownership data uses 2017 agricultural census (most recent comprehensive census). Wealth inequality uses Credit Suisse and academic estimates. Police killing statistics from Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública and state governments. Indigenous population and territory data from FUNAI and CIMI (Indigenist Missionary Council). Where multiple sources provide different estimates, this study uses middle-range scholarly consensus.

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Time Span Covered: 525 years (1500-2025)

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